# THE POLITICS OF COMMITMENT:

# THE EARLY NEW LEFT IN BRITAIN 1956-1962.

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CONTENTS

## DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis has been composed by myself and is my own work.

Caroline Bamford.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank all those who have helped me in the researching and writing of this thesis. In particular, I am grateful to the people who agreed to talk to me, some more than once, for their interest, their help, and their hospitality. Without them, neither the early new left, nor this thesis, would have ever got off the ground. My thanks to people for their practical help, especially the staff of the National Library of Scotland and my typist, Mrs Glover. I would like to thank my supervisor, Gian Poggi, and Angus Erskine, Donald MacKenzie and my women's group for having discussed my thesis as it progressed. Perhaps most importantly, I'd like to thank all my friends, and my mother, who in direct and indirect ways have sustained me and my thesis over these last years. The responsibility for what I have written is, of course, mine, but I could not have written it at all without them.

ABSTRACT OF THESIS

THE POLITICS OF COMMITMENT: THE EARLY NEW LEFT IN BRITAIN, 1956-1962

This thesis is a study of a social movement, the early new left, that made a radical break with the past. A Loose amalgam of Communist Party members, young non-aligned people and left-wing Labour Party supporters, it grew up in disaffection from the traditional left. Whilst ex Communist Party members reworked their socialist commitment following Khrushchev's 'secret speech' and the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956, a new generation of young people were drawn into political activity out of opposition to the foreign and defence policies of the Government of their day.

These groups found common ground in their commitment to a humanist socialism. As communist dissidents, through the journals the Reasoner and the New Reasoner sought to free marxism from dogma, and to reassess the prospects for socialism in the 1950s, Universities and Left Review supporters campaigned for a socialism conceived as a 'whole way of life'. Both groups gave their very active support to the nascent campaign for nuclear disarmament. In 1960, these two journals merged to form the New Left Review. By now, local supporters of this new left politics had set up discussion and campaigning groups of their own, the new left clubs. 'For all comers and all issues', the New Left Review and the clubs were very positive attempts to free socialist politics from the dogmatism and the sectarianism of the cold war. But the movement and the first phase of the New Left Review were relatively short lived. The myriad problems that a non-aligned movement faces had overwhelmed the majority of the clubs by 1963. Meanwhile the New Left Review, always an unhappy amalgam of people from very different political traditions, did not survive the divergent pressures of providing theoretical analysis, visiting speakers and administrative support for the movement. Following long and heated discussions, the journal changed hands at the end of 1962.

Chapters 1 to 4 trace the political and historical context in which the early new left developed. The national, foreign and defence policies of the post war Labour Party, in and out of office, are set beside Communist Party and pacifist oppositions. Subsequent chapters describe how the four journals were published, and how both the movement for nuclear disarmament and the early new left movement were formed. Through library research, studying internal memoranda and lengthy interviews with over twenty of the people who were active in varied ways (editing the journals, administering the journals and the clubs, participating in new left activities), both the public life and the personal experience of the early new left is discussed.

The thesis touches too on some issues that the early new left ignored. Despite its commitment to retrieve all areas of social life for socialism, the family, ideologies of parenthood, gender divisions (and the position of women in particular), escaped its critical gaze. These absences are explained in terms of the context in which the early new left evolved.

## Brief Chronology

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| 1945 | May | Victory in Europe. |
| | July | Labour victory in General Election - massive majority of 146 over all other parties. |
| | August 6th | Atom bomb dropped in Hiroshima by the USA. |
| | August 9th | Atom bomb dropped on Nagasaki by the USA. |
| | September | Formal surrender by the Japanese. |
| 1946 | March | Churchill's Fulton Speech, naming the 'iron curtain' between East and West, and calling for greater Anglo-American co-operation against the USSR. |
| 1947 | | Marshall Plan, funded by the USA,taken up in Western Europe. |
| | September | Establishment of the Cominform to 'exchange of experience and co-operation of activities' between USSR and Eastern Europe. It named 'two camps', the'imperialist anti-democratic camp', and the 'anti-imperialist democratic camp'. |
| 1948 | May | British Government announce decision to manufacture Atom bomb. |
| | June | Berlin Blockade. (Finally lifted, May 1949). |
| 1949 | April | NATO formed - Britain, Belgium, Italy, Netherlands Denmark, Luxembourg, Portugal, Iceland, Norway, Canada, USA, founder members. Pledged mutual assistance against the Soviet Union. West Germany joined Sept. 1949. |
| | August | U.S. Atomic Energy Commission announced decision to produce 'more effective' bombs. |
| 1950 | January | USSR announce parity with the USA in the atomic field. |
| | February | Labour victory in General Election. Majority of 6. |
| | June | Outbreak of war in Korea. (Armistice not signed till June, 1953). |
| | December | NATO decision to rearm West Germany. |
| 1951 | October | Conservative victory in General Election.- majority of 17. (Labour polled more votes). |

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|---|---|---|
| 1952 | January | 10 Jewish Kremlin Doctors implicated in the deaths of Zhdanov and high military figures. (Charges dropped April, 1953). |
| 1953 | | British Atom bomb tests. |
| | June | Julius and Ethel Rosenburg executed in the USA on conviction for atomic espionage. |
| | August | USSR announced successful H bomb test. |
| 1954 | March | Massive US nuclear tests at Bikini. |
| 1955 | April | White paper on defence announced that Britain was to manufacture H bomb. |
| | May | Conservative victory at General Election. Majority of 58. |
| 1956 | February | Khrushchev made a 'secret speech' at the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU. |
| | July | The Reasoner published by critical Communist Party members in Britain (3 issues in all). |
| | October | British and French troops invade Suez. |
| | November | Soviet troops invade Hungary. |
| 1957 | February | National Council for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons Tests formed. |
| | April | Direct Action Committee against Nuclear War formed. |
| | Spring | Universities and Left Review published |
| | Summer | The New Reasoner published |
| | November | H bomb tests by Britain at Christmas Island. |
| 1958 | January | The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament formed. |
| 1959 | February | Castro to power in Cuba, and started to legislate for socialism. |
| | October | Conservative victory at General Election. Majority of 100. |

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|---|---|---|
| 1960 | January | New Left Review published, following the merger of the Universities and Left Review and the New Reasoner. |
| | October | Labour Party Conference. Voted for unilateralism, and to retain clause 4 of the party constitution. |
| | October | Committee of 100 formed. |
| 1961 | April | 1,200 US anti-Castro activists invade the Bay of Pigs, Cuba. They were defeated in a few days. |
| | June | Restrictions placed on freedom of movement from East to West Berlin. |
| | August-October | Series of nuclear weapons tests by the USSR. |
| | September | Series of nuclear weapons tests by the USA. |
| | October | Reversal of unilateralism vote at the Labour Party conference. |
| 1962 | October 22nd-28th | Cuban missile crisis. |
| | December | Changeover in the editorship of the New Left Review |
| 1963 | January | Gaitskell dies. |
| | August | First Test Ban Treaty between the USA, USSR and others. Agreed to a moritorium on nuclear testing in the atmosphere, outer space and under water. |
| 1964 | October | Labour victory in the General Election. Majority of 5. |

## INTRODUCTION : THE CONTESTED REVIEW

The journal the New Left Review has had a less than harmonious past. It began in 1960 as an unhappy amalgam of two journals with different emphases and styles. With the change in editors in 1961-62, it developed a new identity and direction, breaking with its early history. A protracted battle ensued. The two main protagonists, Edward Thompson and Perry Anderson, drew the battle lines wide. Edward Thompson, an editor of the parent journal the New Reasoner, and a member of the NLR board, launched an attack in the name of '1956', and the politics it had inspired.[1] Perry Anderson, the New Left Review's editor, counter-attacked as the defiant and confident leader of a younger generation of socialist intellectuals.

> "In a voice choking with anger, Edward Thompson has denounced the historical and theoretical work on British society developed in this review", (Anderson, 1966:2)

charged Perry Anderson, rushing into battle against his 'deluded' attacker. Each derided the knowledge, the judgement, the 'credentials' the very reason of the other.

They argued most fully over the interpretation of the 'quality' of British history, and its relationship to socialist theory. In Perry Anderson's judgement, socialist historians had failed to provide what socialists sorely needed: "a 'totalising' history of modern British society" (Anderson, 1964:27). For Edward Thompson, this charge amounted not only to a condemnation of his own and other historians' scholarship, but to a belittling of the struggles of the past. He found, in this analysis, "an undisclosed model of other Countries, whose typological symmetry offers a reproach to British exceptionalism". (Thompson, 1965:312).

1. See Thompson, E.P. (1965). He was responding to a series of essays by Perry Anderson and an NLR team member, Tom Nairn. These were Anderson (1964); Nairn (1964, a,b,c,d,).

"'And other countries,' said Mr Podsnap remorsefully. 'They do how?'

'They do', returned Messrs. Anderson and Nairn severely: 'They do - we are sorry to be obliged to say it - in Every Respect Better. Their Bourgeois Revolutions have been mature. Their Class Struggles have been Sanguinary and Unequivocal. Their Intelligentsia has been Autonomous and Integrated Vertically. Their Morphology has been Typologically Concrete. Their Proletariat has been hegemonic.'" (Thompson, 1965:312).

'He is groping in the night of his own memories' was the explanation that Perry Anderson gave for Edward Thompson's 'blind castigations', (Anderson, 1966:31,30). Edward Thompson however, thought Perry Anderson and his 'co-author' Tom Nairn, to be suffering from 'political innocence', unable to comprehend the political context of ideas and choices' Thompson, (1965:338) that they were squeezing into their 'totalising' schema.

These disagreements were not forgotten with the passage of time. After several years in which neither Edward Thompson nor Perry Anderson published anything on this heated dispute, Edward Thompson entered the fray once again. In 1973, and again in 1978, he staked out the differences he had with the review that had 'excluded' its founders. He even reprinted the unexpurgated version of his original condemnatory essay from 1965.[1]

In 1980, Perry Anderson answered these attacks by publishing a book devoted to a measured consideration of Edward Thompson's work. He began on a note of unmitigated praise:

> "Edward Thompson is our finest socilaist writer today - certainly in England, possibly in Europe'. " (Anderson, 1980:1).

And he went on to apologise to Edward Thompson for the wounds that his polemic had so obviously inflicted. He argued here that the real basis for Edward Thompson's grievance lay not in their differences over socialist analysis -

1. See Thompson, E.P. (1973; 1978).

'No great chasm seems to exist between his position and ours on any of the substantive questions he raises' (ibid:135) - but in 'the circumstances of the change in personnel and control of the Review itself, in 1962-1963' (ibid:135). Perry Anderson then described how he saw the events of that time, and explained why he had responded so violently to Edward Thompson's attacks.[1] Clearly, relations between Edward Thompson and the new journal have improved. Both the New Left Review and New Left Books have devoted whole publications to Edward Thompson's analysis of the new cold war - to 'exterminism ..' - .carrying essays by Edward Thompson, and responses by other authors.[2] Edward Thompson's account of the breakdown in relationships still awaits the second volume of Reasoning of which Poverty of Theory was the first.

I began to write this thesis before Perry Anderson's attempt to heal the rift between the old New Left Review, and the new. Reading the argument between Perry Anderson and Edward Thompson, it was clear to me that they were disputing about more than British history, and its relationship to socialist theory. Indeed, the accusations and counter accusations flowed so freely, that the content of their disagreements was hard to pin down, and harder still to assess.[3] I belong to a younger generation of socialists than Perry Anderson or Edward Thompson. I had no prior knowledge of the

1. Thompson was still arguing about the issues that were contested in the 1950s and early 1960s in 1979. The History Workshop Journal conference that year held a debate on The Poverty of Theory, to which Thompson contributed. This debate is published in Samuel (ed) (1981).

2. See Thompson, E.P. (1980); Williams (1980); Medvedev and Medvedev (1981); Bahro (1982); Magri (1982).

3. Perry Anderson, and the other writers that the later NLR published, did not write in an accessible way on the whole. Tom Wengraf, a member of the NLR team, considered why they had written in such an academicist style, and concluded: "We must have not so much been writing for the general left readership we were supposed to be writing for: rather for an Imaginary Examiner in the Sky... Wengraf, (1979:60) - a marxist scholar who would recognise their authoritativeness.

political context that had made them protagonists, nor of the personal reasons for their mutual distrust. I belonged neither with Edward Thompson's 'socialist humanists' nor with Perry Anderson's 'marxist intellectuals', the massed batallions they appeared to be defending. Uncertain of the content of their disagreements, I became curious about the very recent past out of which this battle had grown.

I embarked on an historical study of the early new left, the new left that Edward Thompson identified with so closely, and that Perry Anderson appeared to reject. I discovered a rich, varied and novel political movement, united, albeit briefly, in the very diversity of its supporters and campaigns. The circumstances that made enemies of Perry Anderson and Edward Thompson were the result of this movement's failure to sustain the range of activity that it had initiated. It is a movement which rewards detailed study, touching more people and raising more issues than Perry Anderson and Edward Thompson's disputing suggests.

## The Early New Left: A Brief Description

The early new left was a loose amalgam of ex Communist Party members, young non-aligned people and left-wing Labour Party supporters, that came together in the response to the 'twin crises' of 1956. Whilst ex Communist Party members reworked their socialist commitment following Khrushchev's 'secret speech' and the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956, a new generation of young people were drawn into political activity out of opposition to the Suez invasion. These groups found common ground in their commitment to a 'humanist' socialism. As the communist dissidents, through the journal the New Reasoner, sought to free marxism from dogma and to reassess the prospects for socialism in the 1950s, Universities and Left Review supporters campaigned for a socialism conceived as a 'whole way of life'.

Both groups gave their very active support to the nascent movement for nuclear disarmament.

In 1960, these two journals merged to form the New Left Review. By now, local supporters of this new left politics had set up discussion and campaigning groups of their own, the new left clubs. 'For all comers and all issues', the New Left Review and the clubs were very positive attempts to free socialist politics from the dogmatism and the sectarianism of the cold war. But the movement, and the first phase of the New Left Review, were relatively short-lived. By 1963, the majority of the clubs had disbanded. Meanwhile the New Left Review, always an unhappy amalgam of people from very different political traditions, did not survive the divergent pressures of providing theoretical analysis, visiting speakers and administrative support for the movement. Following long and heated discussions, the journal changed hands at the end of 1962.

The early new left, like the nuclear disarmament movement, was overwhelmingly middle class. Many of the journal's editors and editorial boards worked in higher education; their readers and supporters, typically, were students and young professional workers. Led by intellectuals, and supported by the young middle class, the early new left arose at a time when working class politics were quiescent. Their numbers were small. The circulation of the New Left Review, at its peak, was about 10,000. The clubs had a maximum of 3,000 members.[1] The early new left tried, and failed, to attract working class support. Arguably, they were more in touch with the 'quality of life' than with oppression; with the threat of nuclear annihilation than exploitation. Clearly these are not exclusive concerns; an understanding of the nature of power, in capitalism, can show how cultural, political, economic and military interests are

1. Nearly 9,000 copies of NLR 1 were sold. (See NLR 2:69). The figure for club membership is from Minutes, NLR editorial board, 6.10.60.

linked in complex but real ways. The early new left did make some headway in understanding how different experiences are connected. But, coming to this from middle class backgrounds, and sharing their ideas in an almost exclusively middle class milieu, their awareness of working class experience and politics was necessarily limited.

I have mentioned already that the early new left arose at a time when organised working class politics were relatively quiescent. 1950s 'affluence', as many authors have noted, had the effect of damping official trade union action, andencouraging unofficial strikes. It was in the 1950s that the shop steward's movement gathered ground. But neither the significance nor the potential of this movement was recognised at the time.[1] As the Labour Party, through the 1950s, made its peace with capitalism, and as the official leadership of the trade unions continued to be dominated by right wingers, a working class socialist revolution seemed a very distant prospect indeed.

It was this very affluence that made middle class protest possible. Through the post-war expansion in secondary education, young middle class and some working class people were promised careers and status that had previously been preserved for the upper middle and upper classes. In fact, many of these new beneficiaries of higher education found themselves destined for lower level white collar jobs, or careers in the less prestigious professions. For some, this experience was a politicising one: white collar workers, teachers, social workers, were among the 'new publics' to whom the new left appealed.

Education can also be radicalising in itself. Experiences can be made sense of, perspectives broadened, insights gained. And to have a period

1. See for example Pelling (1963); Lane (1974); Hyman (1975).

of full-time study with neither the restrictions of childhood nor the responsibilities of adulthood, as university students in particular do, frees people to think creatively, and often 'heretically'. It was, and is, a route into the left.[1]

The early new left did make a break with the past. It refused to be trapped, as socialists for a decade had been, by the 'two camps' politics of the cold war. Defending neither East nor West, the early new left looked to a new socialist politics that, rejecting Stalinism on the one hand, and 'welfare capitalism' on the other, could be humanist and non-partisan. A basic commitment was to nuclear disarmament.

The nuclear disarmament movement came together at the same time as the early new left and was of fundamental importance to it. Growing, initially, from opposition to Britain's nuclear testing programme, the nuclear disarmament movement was, first and foremost, a moral movement. The call for unilateralism - for Britain to dismantle its nuclear arsenal, whether other countries do or not - was made first of all on moral grounds.

The 'moral' nature of unilateralism was connected to it being a middle class cause. Political arguments in unilateralism's favour came later. The early new left had a part in developing these. 'Positive co-existence', and a 'third force of neutral nations' were policies that they analysed and campaigned for. Nuclear disarmament was, they believed, one very important way of breaking the grip of the cold war.

## The Existent Literature on the Early New Left

The early new left has not been very thoroughly researched. It received a lot of attention from political commentators at the time, and some partici-

1. Theodore Roszak argues similarly in Roszak (1970).

pants in the early new left have argued for its strengths in subsequent years.[1] But there has been very little in the way of detailed historical work or analysis on the early new left. The nuclear disarmament movement, likewise, awaits detailed historical study. However, more has been written on the origins, the significance, the politics of the nuclear disarmament movement than on the early new left.[2] And, like the early new left, it inspired much commentary, especially in the early 1960s when the movement's activities were at their height.

Here I am going to look briefly at those writers who have paid greatest attention to the early new left. Four of these - Tom Wengraf, Peter Sedgwick, Nigel Young and William Thompson - were politically active in Britain in the late 1950s and early 1960s; the fourth, David Holden, was not. David Holden has written by far the most detailed account, and it is with this that I shall begin.

David Holden, in The First New Left in Britain, (1976) focuses in particular on the relationship between the early new left and the labour and trade union movement. He makes the point that the 'first' new left belonged with neither the 'old' left that predated it, nor the 'real' new left that came later. It never became an independent movement in its own right, but was fatally caught up in an attempt to influence the 'old' labour left. Holden describes some differences within the 'first' new left here. He sees the New Reasoner group as being part, still, of the 'old'

1. The most concerted effort to do this was the May Day Manifesto movement of 1967-70. In many ways this was a second attempt to form a new left. Supporters held discussion meetings; produced a bi-monthly bulletin; were active in community politics; and discussed in detail the failings of the Labour Party. See Williams (ed) (1968); Williams (1979).

2. See Duff (1971); Exley (1959); Parkin (1958); Taylor and Pritchard (1980).

left. The New Reasoner group he argues, in its concern to maintain links with the labour and trade union left,

> "... showed less interest in broad historical or ontological perspectives than in seeing the left in Britain, i.e. the old-style labour and socialist movement with which they had long been associated, overcome its paralysis in the years since the war. (ibid:124)

They 'depended on the eventual reformation of the old left Labour Party' (p.129). And in the belief that the Labour Party could be turned left-wards, they began to work out the strategies - of workers' control, of a socialist wages plan - for the left in the Labour Party and trade unions to campaign around.

David Holden could not, and does not, analyse the Universities and Left Review group in the same way. Instead, he defines it in terms of its estrangement from the 'old' left, focusing on issues that the old left had tended to ignore. He maintains, however, that, in the absence of alternative strategies and agencies for socialist change the Universities and Left Review remained dependent on the larger socialist movement, and this, despite the Universities and Left Review's efforts, remained 'old' left.

He describes the new left movement in similar terms.

> "Once it had asserted its basic socialist-humanist criticisms, the key problem facing the New Left was how to close the gap in temperament between itself and other segments of the socialist movement, without merely returning to the fold of mainstream Labour politics." (ibid: 199).

He traces the movement's attempt and failure on this score, focusing particularly on the campaign for nuclear disarmament.

D. Holden concludes that the 'first' new left placed 'too much faith' in influencing the traditional socialist movement. He does not develop this point in any depth. He does not describe how the new left could have been significantly different: how it could have turned its

theoretical perspectives to strategies, its interest in community, or in 'youth' or in 'culture' into an alternative movement for socialism. And by focusing so closely on its relationship to the old left, he down-plays what was so novel about the new left in the late 1950s and early 1960s. This is not to deny that it was caught up with considering its position and its strategies vis-a-vis the Labour Party and the trade union movement: no socialist movement then, even more than now, could avoid that. But there was, in the early new left, more variation, dissent, and indeed imagination than comes across in David Holden's account.

There remain some other differences between David Holden's account and mine. David Holden does not consider the role of women in politics, or think about the relevance of the public and private domains to social, or socialist analysis. He also writes only briefly on the internal politics of the journals and the clubs. His consideration of the nuclear disarmament movement, as his account of the new left, focuses on its relationship to the labour and trade union left. Though he did have some interview material he did not use this to consider the experience of being involved, or to assess the potency of gender division on the new left's work.

Other authors can also be characterised in terms of their perspective on the relationship between the old left and the new. Nigel Young (1977) is explicitly concerned with what was <u>new</u> about the new left. He is very critical of the organised labour movement: his interest is in socialist movements that develop an alternative base, and democratic structures, of their own. This has the effect of deflecting him from devoting much attention to the early new left, and he focuses on the period after 1962. His typology of the 'old left' and the 'new left'

is too sharp for the early new Left to have a place within it, and it falls uneasily between the two.[1] It is described as a transition that was more 'old' than 'new', with only temporary relevance, and of limited radicalism.

Nonetheless, he does develop some themes that are complementary to my own. He stresses the cross-fertilisation that took place between the USA and Britain, particularly through the influence of C.Wright Mills. From his interest in the new left as a social movemement, he considers the 'publics' that the new left appealed to and involved. And he gives a very interesting account of the tension that grew up in the nuclear disarmament movement between the leadership and the participants over the course the movement should take.

Nigel Young is more interested in the first years of the nuclear disarmament movement than the early new left. The nuclear disarmament movement, he writes,

> "... represented a new synthesis, the beginnings of a visible social alternative - an imminent counter-culture, that merged personal expressiveness with political activism. " (ibid:28).

And, for the 'new' Left in Britain in this period,

'The novel element was the realignment with radical pacifism which gave the English New Left a conscience during its short early life.' (p. 145).

He goes on to describe how even this was lost:

> "The closeness of ULR to activism in the years 1957-9 is quickly replaced by NLR's alignment with the traditional left, at times supporting the Communist Party against the Trotskyists; in the main pursuing a traditional and fellow-travelling tactic within or alongside the Labour Party. Over the coming years, the Old Left background (never shaken off), the influence of the Bevanite Labour-left and the Communist Party tended to grow stronger again. So much so that when, by 1963, it was becoming clear that the Labour Party strategy had failed, and with the recurrent disappointments of non-aligned internationalism, there was a notable tendency within parts of this English New Left to return to semi-Stalinist solutions.(p.147)

1. See Young (1977:310).

Because firstly of its 'labourism', and secondly of its association with marxism, the early new left, in Nigel Young's judgement, was not particularly 'new'.

William Thompson focuses on new left organisation and activism in his analysis of the new left in Scotland.[1] He gives a brief account of the Fife Socialist League and the Scottish left clubs, describing how the Fife Socialist League was the most organised new left group. The clubs, as he quite rightly argues, were propagandist organisations,

> "disseminating the concept of socialism by meeting and journal. Precise objectives were never defined, and no effort made to organise systematically to gain positions or influence in the labour movement. "(Thompson, 1978:212).

It was in the nuclear disarmament movement that the clubs' influence was the greatest. With no central direction or organisation of its own, Thompson also assesses the clubs in terms of their relationship to the CND and the labour movement. They are not seen as standing alone.

It was Peter Sedgwick, writing in the journal International Socialism, who first made the distinction between the 'old' new left and the 'new'. In an article originally published in 1964, Sedgwick drew on his own experience of left politics to give a less than sympathetic account of the new left around the journal the New Left Review, both 'old' and 'new'.[2] The 'old' new left is the early new left of this thesis; the 'new' New left refers to the New Left Review after 1962, when the editorship changed hands. Sedgwick was able to use personal experience and inside information here, since he knew many new left propagandists, and had attended new left events.

1. See Thompson,W. (1978)

2. See Sedgwick (1964). This is reprinted in Widgery (1978).

International Socialism is the journal of the International Socialists, (now the Socialist Workers' Party), a marxist group whose politics are influenced by the work of Trotsky. This critique of the early new left by Peter Sedgwick is written within the International Socialist tradition. He maintains that the new left, 'old' and 'new' were fundamentally misguided, as they had no links with or involvement in the working class movement on the shop-floor. The 'old' new left,

> "tended to invoke the Labour movement as the framework within which it operated, without giving any theoretical primacy to the economic processes which define Labour, or to the struggles, in the first place industrial, out of which the social character of the movement is constantly renewed." (Sedgwick, 1976:141-2).

Likening the first New Left Review to 'a merry-go-round in which each specialised hobby-horse rotates by turns', he continued:

> "The economic antagonism in production, insufficient and incomplete as it is by itself, is still the ground for all other forms of socialist activity, the permanent reservoir for socialist politics." (ibid: 142).

He was particularly scathing about the new left commitment to 'positive neutralism' in foreign policy.

> "The language of Positive Neutralism, New Powers, and Emergent Peoples was about as illuminating as the rival rhetorics of Free World, Camp of Peace, Western Values and Proletarian Internationalism" (p.144).

The early new left's appeal to 'youth' could not counter-balance its distance from, and irrelevance to, the organised working class. The 'old' new left, he argued, placed great stock in the radicalisation of young people:

> "For Youth was more than another partner in the bloc of claims, it was the banner of the whole confederacy, the source of positives - authenticity of feeling, breadth of response, suspicion of establishment - for activator and analyst alike." (ibid:140).

But despite this concern, the early new left only made any real progress among 'its own further-educated juniors' - while working class socialists, in the young socialists for example, 'remained unscathed by new left ideas'. (P. 140-1).

Nonetheless, Peter Sedgwick does recognise that the 'old' new left did have a constituency of sorts, and did attempt, if unsuccessfully and misguidedly, to engage in socialist campaigning. He criticises the 'new' new left for turning away from 'grass roots' politics. The new journal, in his eyes, had made a welcome theoretical break with the first New Left Review: it was committed now

> "to an activist and Marxist philosophy, in which struggle is acknowledged as the engine of social change, and economic levers are seen as operating at a more fundamental level of potency than cultural influences. Only, the forms of struggle which are picked out for attention and commendation are not those of an industrial working-class movement; they are predominantly either agrarian or technocratic, depending on whether an under developed or advanced society is under scrutiny.(Ibid:148)
>
> Here then is a socialism which puts out no press, organises no party, supports no strikes, rallies no class, carries no banner, articulates no ideology; its work is only to exhort and endorse the initiatives of the guiding directorate, and (where possible) to enter the inner circle of the latter's confidence."(ibid:149).

In Sedgwick's judgement, both the 'old' and the 'new' new left around the New Left Review lacked what any socialist group needs: a base in the working class at the point of production. In distinction from Nigel Young, who criticises the early new left for being too close to the 'old left' of the Labour Party and the trade union movement, and from David Holden, who sees the early new left as at once too dependent and too distanced from them, Peter Sedgwick argues that it was an irrelevance as far as working class politics were concerned. And because it was irrelevant to the working class, it was irrelevant to socialism.

Peter Sedgwick was quick to sound the death-knell of the early new left. Already in 1964, he was writing that 'Not the faintest murmur of this movement now remains', (p.134). While this was an exaggeration, the neo-trotskyist left, and shop-floor militancy, did gain greater prominence in socialist politics over the next few years.

New left supporters themselves were not so happy to see their movement decline, or their sensibilities forgotten. Several - Norman Birnbaum (1961; 1971), Peter Cadogan, (1972), Ralph Millband (1979), Mike Rustin, (1980a,b,), Tom Wengraf, (1979), Sheila Rowbotham, (1973; 1979), Raymond Williams (1965a, 1968, 1976-7, 1979, 1980) and, of course Edward Thompson, to name a few, have written about later developments in socialist politics through the prism of their experiences and concerns in the late '50s and early '60s. The early new left relationship to the labour movement, rightly or wrongly, was but one of its preoccupations. Culture, defined very broadly; the nature of a committed art and the role of the mass media; Britain's foreign and defence policy, were taken, however inadequately, onto the agenda of socialist politics. Although the 'socialist humanism' that embraced these different concerns was never adequately theorised; although the question of agency, and in particular the role of the middle class, of the young, in socialist campaigning was never settled, the early new left cannot be dismissed as a misguided episode in the history of the British left. The majority of participants I spoke to still referred to the early new left as the period in which their political ideas were formed, and as the basis for assessing subsequent socialist initiatives. Though their politics have changed, (through, for example, the experiences of the Vietnam solidarity campaign, or the women's liberation movement, or community politics), only two, Raphael Samuel and to a lesser extent, Stanley Mitchell, are now heavily critical of the early new left.

I would like here to consider just one more author, Tom Wengraf, who has a dissertation written on the journal the New Left Review in its early years of publication.[1]

1. See Wengraf (1979).

Tom Wengraf himself was a member of the New Left Review team between 1963 and 1968. He decided to write this essay because he was unhappy with the identification of the journal under Perry Anderson's editorship with 'Theory'. He argues that the'original project' of the New Left Review under Perry Anderson's editorship bears little relationship to this description. Far from being primarily abstract, the journal had set out to give 'a definite primacy to the empirical, the concrete, the historical, in a comparative and 'totalising' mode.' (Wengraf, 1979:4).

Tom Wengraf's discussion of how the New Left Review developed after 1962 falls beyond the scope of this thesis, and cannot concern us here. But he does make some interesting comments on the New Left Review that Stuart Hall edited when comparing its coverage of Algeria and Cuba with that of the later New Left Review.

He describes the original New Left Review as being 'subjectivist' in approach, concerned both with the 'lived experience' of the events it covers, and with the effect of its writing on the reader. He illustrates this by quoting from the editorial in the New Left Review 7 on the Cuban revolution:

> "Who are we,who are asking these questions? If we are actors, then it is time for us to act. As fellow socialists, we have three duties to the Cuban revolution. First, to understand it. Second to show effective solidarity with the Cuban people in the general course of their revolution. Third, to criticise it. But criticism must follow from, and out of, our performance of the first two duties." (ibid: 62).

Clearly this did have its limitations. Some people's experiences were given more attention than others; and in the case of Cuba for example, the description of 'social misery' took precedence over an historical analysis of the Cuban social structure. It did have advantages though over the 'academicism' of the later New Left Review.

Studying the Early New Left

I, like Tom Wengraf, am interested in 'subjectivity' in politics. A range of issues are involved here, from sense of topic and audience to the intended effects of political writing; from the organisation and accessibility of political campaigning to the experience of being involved. In this study of the early new left, I have documented how new left ideas and campaigns developed, looking not only at published material, but also at internal memoranda, and conducting a series of interviews with people who were involved. I hoped in this way to capture something of the 'life' of the new left, in the groups producing the journals, the new left clubs and the nuclear disarmament campaign.

The published material that I have studied includes the new left journals - the Reasoner, the Universities and Left Review, The New Reasoner, the New Left Review - new left pamphlets; new left books. Through the co-operation of several new left'ers - Tom Wengraf, Mike Rustin, Suzy Benghiat, Nick Faith, Sandy Hobbs - I have been able to look at a range of internal memoranda, including circulars, minutes of meetings held by the Universities and Left Review group, the London Universities and Left Review club which became the London new left club, Scottish new left clubs, and the early New Left Review, and some personal letters from this period. I have interviewed the four editors of the Universities and Left Review: Stuart Hall, Gabriel Pearson, Charles Taylor, Ralph Samuel; the first Business Manager, Rod Prince; the editors of the New Reasoner: E.P. Thompson, John Saville; and Dorothy Thompson, who was also very much involved. All these people, with the exception of Rod Prince, were on the editorial board of the New Left Review.

I also interviewed other NLR board members: John Rex; Mike Rustin, who joined the editorial committee of the later New Left Review in Dec. 1961;

Nick Faith, a member of the NLR's business committee, who joined the board in 1961. I interviewed Clancy Sigal, Stanley Mitchell, Victor Kiernan, who were not on the NLR board, but were close to the journal, and part of the new left. And I interviewed Suzy Benghiat, who did a lot of administrative work for the Universities and Left Review and the New Left Review. From the left clubs, I interviewed Sheila Benson, secretary of the London new left club; Lydia Howard and Tim Negarry from the London schools left club; Jean McCrindle, Scottish representative on the left clubs co-ordinating committee; Sandy Hobbs who was, at different times, the secretary of the Aberdeen, Dundee and Glasgow left clubs; Leone Gold, who worked in the Partisan, a coffee house that the London ULR club set up; Hannah Mitchell; Claudia Roden; Marilyn Butler; Natasha Burkhart; women who all attended the London left club fairly regularly; Lawrence Daly, the founder of a different, but related organisation, the Fife Socialist League, and April Carter, a founder member of the Direct Action Committee against nuclear war (the DAC).

I made contact with the people I interviewed through a 'snowballing' effect. My first contact, Tom Wengraf, a member of the later NLR editorial board, agreed to speak to me out of the blue. He and each person I subsequently spoke to showered me with a list of names and addressed of people 'who you really must see'. I have not been able to see them all. I have chosen this sample to reflect the varied composition of the early new left. The sample is biased towards the new left journals, and the London club. Whilst the new left movement, outside London, would reward more detailed study, I made this choice on the grounds that the early new left, while it was not centrally organised, was very reliant on the journals for ideas and for speakers, and (albeit with variation), on the London club for inspiration.

My interviews were semi-structured and open-ended. With the help of early contacts - Tom Wengraf, Mike Rustin, Hannah Mitchell - I came up with a list of themes to be covered in interviews. These themes had to be amenable to individual variation, enabling me to explore particular topics with individual respondents, questioning them both as encumbents of early new left 'positions' - secretary of the London left club; editor of one of the journals - and as people who had brought particular knowledge and interests to the early new left. The majority of the interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed.

I hope, in what follows, that I have been true to C.Wright Mills description of method and theory:

> "'Method' has to do, first of all, with how to ask and answer questions with some assurance that the answers are more or less durable. 'Theory' has to do, above all, with paying close attention to the words one is using, especially their degree of generality and their logical relations. The primary purpose of both is clarity of conception and economy of procedure and most importantly just now, the release rather than the restriction of the sociological imagination."(Mills, 1970:134-5).

Understanding a real movement, real events, requires many kinds of theory. I have chosen here to focus on feminism, since it has so often been ignored by the existing sociological imagination.

I have been particularly concerned, in researching and writing this thesis, that women should not be hidden from the history of the early new left. Many women were involved. Communist Party dissidents; left Labour Party members; pacifists; some women new left supporters had had considerable political experience before 1956. Others were inspired to protest by the events of that tumultuous year, or were drawn into the new left as it gained greater political presence. They attended club meetings, and participated in nuclear disarmament marches, and some took on responsibility for administration and organising campaigns.

The early new left was, undoubtedly, male-dominated. It was men, more than women, who edited the journals, wrote the articles, spoke at meetings. And, in the 1950s, gender differences were not seen in political terms. But, in common with other political groups, women were active in essential, if traditional ways. Women, more than men, were the business managers for the journals, and the background administrators and 'confidentes' of the early new left. Some did have formal offices - Sheila Benson was secretary of the London left club for a time; Jean McCrindle was the Scottish clubs representatives on the left clubs co-ordinating committee - but most did not. Instead, they worked behind the scenes, clearing the ground for and giving support to the male 'heroes' of the movement.

## Women, History and Politics

Societies are differentiated by class, by race - by gender. The 'gender system', under which women are subordinate to male power, is a dynamic one. It varies historically and culturally, tying in with, but not reducible to, social differentiation by class and race. Its effect, put most simply, is that the world is a very different place for women and men. Our socialisation, education, sexuality, relationship to reproduction and childcare, our position in the household, our employment are all gender specific. And as our experience is bounded by gender, so too is our understanding.

It is only in relatively recent years that knowledge has been seen in gender-specific terms. Male language, male theory, male science, the products on the whole of male-dominated institutions, have posed for all too long as 'gender-free'. And male bias, where it has been acknowledged, has been presented as a good thing, enhancing the objectivity and the rationality of the work. There is now a growing body of feminist

research. Feminist history,[1] feminist social science,[2] feminist science,[3] feminist literature[4] and criticism have made gender differentiation a subject for study, at all levels. Research methods, topics and presentation;[5] research institutions and the way they are run, are being critically and creatively appraised. Real inroads have been made: women, and women's experience, have at least been brought onto the academic agenda.

What follows is not a study of women's history, as such, and I would hesitate to call it feminist. My topic, the early new left, was a male-dominated political movement in which men and women were unequally involved. There was a fairly traditional division of labour, at the centre, between male intellectuals and female administrators. The 'heroes' of the movement were male: they edited the journals; wrote the majority of the articles; spoke at the clubs. Women, meanwhile were the business managers, office workers, diplomats. The early new left was not sensitive to the inequalities of gender, and its politics were male-defined as a result.

I have tried in this study to do two things vis-a-vis feminist analysis. Firstly, I have attempted to locate the early new left in the political and social context of Britain in the 1950s, in order to explain why the early new left remained unaware of gender as a political issues. And I

1. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese (1982) surveys women's history to date, and provides a very useful bibliography.

2. See for example Rosalind Brunt and Caroline Rowan (eds) (1982); Margaret Stacey and Marion Price (1981); Vicky Randall (1982).

3. See for example Rita Arditti (1982) and Hilary Rose (1982).

4. See for example Ellen Moers (1978); Tilly Olsen (1980); Elaine Showalter (1977).

5. See Helen Robers (ed) (1981); Dale Spender (1980).

have tried to ensure that women's involvement and experience is not completely subsumed in an account of the activities of the more prominent male actors. Absent from the public intellectual life of the movement, it was in private and informal ways that women's presence was felt, and their contribution made.

Women, History and Politics: The Context of the Cold War.

In my thesis, I have attemped to map out, broadly, the parameters, and the ideologies of women's experience. I focus particularly on the family, since women's responsibilities in managing the household and meeting the needs of its members tended to dominate their lives. In 1950s Britain, the sexual division of labour was very clearly drawn. The public domain of paid employment, of political activity, of community life, was even more of a male preserve than it is today. Women's access to it was dependent on the extent of their domestic responsibilities. Women who did take on paid work (and many women had to in order to support their families) were channelled into a restricted range of women's jobs. Their employment opportunities and their rates of pay were significantly lower than men's.

The public and the private are not autonomous domains. Production and reproduction; the economy and welfare; the state and the family are integrally related, though the nature and the content of the relationship between them has varied culturally and through time. As the ideologies, laws, policies that legitimate and control the public and the private have changed historically, so too has the experience of these different domains.

In the 1950s, the division between the public world, that men controlled, and the private world, that women were constrained by, was legitimated by the ideologies of motherhood and family life that were particularly prevalent then. Both the family, and women's role within it, were idealised

in the 1950s propaganda. The dominant view that women were mothers first and workers second spanned the political spectrum.[1] So too did the model of the family as an economic unit, in which a male 'head' and breadwinner was joined by a female 'home-maker' who, if need be, would provide some economic support. 'Housewives', 'mothers' and family life came in for special celebration: liberal democracy and a 'strengthened' (i.e. traditional) family went, so we were told, hand in hand.

Gender differences were, and are, controlled by law. To quote Vicky Randall,

> "... writers on this subject are in startling agreement. They show that, with only minor exceptions, the cumulative effect of a vast battery of laws and policies was, directly and indirectly, to reinforce women's dependence upon men and responsibility for home-making and child-rearing." (Randall, 1982:108).

Vicky Randall goes on to describe how marriage, sexuality and fertility, motherhood, income, employment and education have been defined and regulated in ways that have reinforced women's traditional role as mothers and housewives. Other authors have identified the ways that the state serves to sustain the family form, and perpetrate male dominance.

In the 1950s, this went largely unchallenged. The post-war programme of welfare policy took the nuclear family as its basis, and was premised on a division of labour between wage-earning husbands and home-making wives. The state did little to relieve women of domestic and childcare responsibilities. There were no state-run services, as there had been in war-time, to lessen the amount of domestic labour that women had to do. Care for pre-school children, for children outside school hours, for ageing relatives, continued to be women's private work. Family allowances were set at a level too low to relieve serious hardship.

1. The Communist Party was a slight exception here, though even this moved closer to the dominant view of women's role in the 1950s.

They took little of the worry and toil out of caring for dependent children and relatives. National assistance levels were meagre too, and were paid to husbands not wives (As I go onto argue in Ch.3; it was less family welfare than higher levels of employment that was responsible for the reduction in family poverty in the 1950s) .

Laws and social policy relating to sexuality and contraception were also family-based. Homosexuality was illegal for men, (though, interestingly, never for women - perhaps sexual relationships between women were not considered to be properly sexual) and divorce was difficult to obtain. Contraception was made freely available only to married women, and legal abortions were extremely restricted. The law, then, served to endorse sex and procreation within marriage. There were meanwhile some areas, both within marriage and outside it, where the absence of laws served to oppress women. Domestic violence (unlike male homosexuality and abortion) was too 'private' an issue to become a legal matter. And there was very little legislation against sexual discrimination in the 'public' domain, and none against unequal rates of pay.

From the mid 1960s, the law has been liberalised in all these areas. Nonetheless, women's options, now as then, are 'politically constructed', to use Vicky Randall's phrase. The public domain is still male-dominated and male controlled; women are still constrained by 'private' responsibilities, and subordinate to male power. Now there is an active women's movement committed to ending women's oppression, but this was not the case in the 1950s. 1950s feminism, as I go on to argue, did not seek to transform the gender order, but rather to secure better conditions and higher status for women's 'special contribution'. Many feminists were party to the celebration of women as wives and mothers first, and workers second.

There was still a considerable degree of dissonance between the 'womanhood' as it was celebrated, and as it was lived. The pervasiveness of ideologies of women's special role and the virtues of family living could not take the drudgery out of women's work, or compensate for the restrictions they faced throughout their lives. But it was not until the 1960s that women expressed their unhappiness in political ways. Politics, in the 1950s, was firmly located in the male-dominated public domain. Those issues that do have direct bearing on the private domain, such as nursery school provision, welfare benefits, health, housing, were not seen as being 'properly' political. Rather, they were 'administrative', 'social' or 'cultural' - not the stuff of which <u>real</u> politics is made. Women's needs and women's rights were seldom discussed, and then, not in their own right. Typically, it was only in relation to the needs of other family members - of children, of the old, of the sick, of men - that women's needs were given any consideration at all.

In my thesis, I have traced the ideologies of women's role and family life back to World War Two. I was interested in how these ideologies were able to take hold after the transformation of women's work in wartime. I found that this transformation went hand in hand with the idealisation of the family, and the proliferation of 'romance'. When returning servicemen reclaimed 'their' jobs; when the nurseries were closed; women were pushed into the full-time home-making that they had built up to expect and enjoy. It was not until the 1960s that women began to assert that their disappointment and unhappiness were <u>political</u> concerns.

## <u>Women and Political Activity</u>

While women are, and have been, under-represented in political elites, they have still had an impact on political life. Officially powerless

they may have been, but their contribution should not be undervalued.

To quote Elizabeth Fox-Genovese,

> "... the undervaluation of women has not only led to the slighting of women's participation in slave revolts, jacqueries, strikes and revolutions; it has also led to the slighting of their formidable contribution to the building of slave societies, the suppression of jacqueries, the consolidation of big business and the efforts of counter-revolution."(Fox-Genovese, 1982:29).

But, as Elizabeth Fox-Genovese argues, the history of women is both tragic and complex, and, I would add, difficult to research. Their influence has, of necessity, been indirect more than direct, unevenly documented and easily lost. Women's active participation in recent political life is more readily accessible, but even this is very sparsely research. Vicky Randall, in her survey of the evidence for the claim that women are less active that men, found that very little empirical work had been done. She concludes, still, that 'Overall, the evidence suggests that women's political participation, conventionally defined, is everywhere less than men's '(Randall, 1982:40), adding that this difference is diminishing and is likely to continue to do so, over time.

Vicky Randall argues that women have been deterred, understandably, by the fact that conventional politics is a man's world. Its public concerns can seem too distant. Meetings are often held at times and in places that women who have children are unable to attend. The style and atmosphere is typically 'masculine' - aggressive and competitive, and often hostile to women. And the leaders are most likely to be men, the credentials for leadership male-defined.

Women have participated in conventional politics nonetheless. They have worked, unacknowledged, behind the scenes. They have done the secretarial work, and organised the social life of the party or group. Particular women have gained more prominence, but they have been exceptions, and often

exceptional. Sometimes, local circumstances have enabled them to take office, (the absence of a 'suitable' man; or a split within the group); often they have been more self-consciously independent than their sisters. A sexual division of labour operates within political organisations as it operates outside them, and very few organisations have taken positive measures to lessen it.[1]

Vicky Randall found that women were more likely to be active in unconventional politics: in single-issue campaigns; community politics; women's associations. Here, they have been able to take up issues that have greater bearing on their daily experience. Meetings can be more flexible, in timing, in location, in organisation, in style. The nuclear disarmament movement is another example of an unconventional political movement where women were, and are, very much involved. I have given a separate account of how women were active in the nuclear disarmament movement in an attempt to ensure that their contribution is not undervalued or lost.

The early new left itself did not take up gender divisions or women's oppression. Some participants were blind to them; others did not see them as 'properly' political. For all its openness to 'all comers and all issues', women's separate experience was as submerged in the early new left as it was in the politics of its day. Why did the early new left, given that it did attempt to be radical about everything, fail to recognise gender divisions and women's oppression? The very strength of 1950s ideology of 'equality in difference' between men and women clearly deflected them. But there were also some features of the early

1. Debate within the Labour Party is currently (March 1983) taking place on the introduction of positive discrimination to achieve parity between women and men in leadership positions in the party.

new left itself that worked against it gaining greater insight. It was a young, short-lived and hectic movement, which, over four years of active campaigning, did not evolve radically new organisational forms. While it tried to be democratic, and to avoid the centralism of the Communist Party, and the 'bureaucracy' of the traditional left, it did not devise alternative principles, of collective working for example, to take their place. It relied instead on the most energetic and assertive people to take on public responsibilities and less confident people to work behind the scenes. Perhaps if it had survived for longer, this pattern would have changed. But the exhaustion of the key people coincided with the demoralisation of the movement, and there was no serious attempt to revive the early new left in a different form.

It is very unlikely that women will achieve equality in circumstances such as these, unless they have a separate organisation to draw on. The strength of women in the nuclear disarmament movement in the 1980s is evidence of how women can take a positive lead. They have achieved this because there is a network of women's groups on which they can draw, and from which they can derive emotional and practical support. In the 1950s, the picture was very different: then, the organised women's movement was very small. Women had no separate organisations to support them, and less sense of what they, as women, shared. There was no real solidarity between women in the early new left. They did not discuss their experiences as women, and reflect on their position in the movement. Instead, they participated in whatever ways they could, and only later gave serious consideration to how they had been less than equal there. It is worth noting that many women new left supporters were to become feminists in the 1960s, and instigators of the nascent movement for women's liberation.

# CHAPTER 1

## CHAPTER I : WINNING THE PEACE? THE 1945 LABOUR GOVERNMENT

The depression of the 1930s, the most severe by far that capitalism had engendered, was brought to an effective if cataclysmic close by the outbreak of war. More devastating and more total than any previous war, World War Two forced a shift, but not a transformation, in capitalist relations. On this foundation was built a precarious peace.

This war, in Britain, had been widely seen as legitimate and just. There had been some opposition: the Communist Party and Trotskyist groups, claiming that this war was a capitalist war, had urged the British people not to participate with the aggressors of either side. But when the German army attacked the USSR, destroying the non-aggression pact that existed between those two powers, the Communist Party added their support to Britain's programme of mobilisation against the Nazi aggressor. Pacifists also protested, but on different grounds. They saw all war as both immoral and futile, and World War Two as no exception. In the belief that this war was not inevitable, they campaigned for the rights of those who did refuse to fight, and they pressed for an early armistice and the resumption of talks.[1] But their numbers were few. As the Parliamentary parties formed a coalition Government the better to co-ordinate the strategy of war, the depiction of this recourse to arms as the terrible but necessary result of the conflict in political ideologies between different nation states, between fascism and democracy, gained ever wider support. And whilst pacifists persisted in making the case that an ideology cannot be destroyed by killing those who believe in it,[2] the British people were mobilised, more extensively than in any previous war, to defeat 'the Nazi's'.

1. See Morrison (1962:37-64), for an account of pacifist activity in war-time.
2. See Morrison (1962:75).

To wage this war, the Government embarked on a programme of planned production that challenged the very ideals for which the war was ostensibly being fought. Men, employed or no, were directed by the Government into the work, in industry and the services, that was deemed essential for a country at war. As the reserve of male labour was exhausted, it became increasingly imperative that women be brought into employment on a large scale and the Government, in May 1940, embarked on a campaign to persuade women to register for work outside the home. Their attempts met with little success.[1] These women, without adequate information as to what work they were likely to be given, did not trust that they would be matched to suitable jobs (and, in terms of pre-war preferences, they clearly were not).[2] In March 1941 the Government issued an order requiring women as well as men to register at labour exchanges. In December, the National Service (No. 2) Act conscripted all single women between the ages of 20 and 30 except those with a dependent child into the women's services, civil defence work or the war industries. By the end of 1943, women between the ages of 18 and 50 were being registered and directed away from their homes to war work, 'if there was no compelling reason to the contrary', (Davis, 1975). Even women who did have heavy domestic responsibilities (such as women with young children whose husbands were in the services), took up this newly available paid employment, compelled not by Government legislation but by economic need.[3]

This new workforce, channelled into employment at the Government's direction, was faced with hard and inflexible conditions of work. Hours were

1. See Inman (1957).

2. See Mass Observation (1942) for both descriptions and analysis of women's war work.

3. Servicemen's wives allowances were low. A married woman with three children received 34/-, compared with £4/10/-, the average male wage in industry. (Summerfield, 1977).

long and rates of pay were fixed, and there was no guarantee of further employment at the end of the war.[1] But for other workers, the conditions of work did improve. Wages went up while the length of the average working day (before overtime) went down. The trade unions grew steadily stronger, attracting more members, and organising more strikes to defend the interests of their members.[2] And the very fact that work was available brought a real improvement in the conditions of people's lives. After the wide-spread experience and the even wider-spread fear of unemployment in the 1930s, work could, at least, be had. And whilst working conditions were hard, they were controlled; whilst wages remained low, they were guaranteed; and whilst hours were still long, the state did relieve the workforce of some of its childcare responsibilities and domestic tasks.[3]

The end of unemployment had a further significance beyond the amelioration of privation that necessarily accompanied it. The state direction of production for war gave the lie to the capitalist doctrine that market forces must be left to operate freely, and carry work, wages and prosperity in their wind. It showed that the state could intervene in production and distribution without jeopardising the viability or the profitability of private enterprise, for once industries had altered their production lines to comply with government regulations they were guaranteed both

1. See Miliband (1972) for a description of the political effects of Britain's participation in war.

2. See Marwick (1968:289). He takes his figures from Ministry of Labour (1946-47:4, 304-7).

3. Local authorities organised a massive network of nurseries, nursery schools and childminders to release mothers for employment, and there were various provisions for the care of children after school. The state also took over some other areas of domestic work - there were 'communal laundries' and 'communal feeding' schemes.

buyer and workforce, at a stable price and a non-negotiable wage. This experience of state intervention in war-time brought an important shift in the relationship between the state and capitalism in peace. And despite the great hostility that greeted the 1945 Labour Government's economic policies, extending as they did the role of the state in peace time, Labour's measures were not all undone by the Conservative administrations that succeeded Labour.

This war also engendered a popular radicalism that challenged the restricted democracy it was being fought to protect. After the first stage of the 'phoney-war', when Britain's very survival was threatened, the war effort had been given broad and largely unquestioning support. But once the threat had, to an extent, receded, there developed both disillusionment and anger with the party that had led the country to the brink of disaster, and all it represented. This disillusion extended to the Government in war. Comprised of many of the politicians who had failed to provide either work or welfare in the 1930s, it could not claim to have changed its policy as a result of a sudden appreciation of people's needs.

Whilst the Government had taken some measures to improve peoples living conditions, the demands of war were also keeping real improvements severely in check. The pattern of people's daily lives was disrupted as material hardship (such as bad housing and low incomes) was coupled with insecurity, suffering and loss. A sense of shared experience and common cause grew in the face of adversity and became, both in the forces and the civilian population, an important foundation of the will for change. The British people were praised now for their efforts and sacrifices in war. Many came to expect, and indeed to demand, a better social order in peace time. The massive Soviet sacrifices in the war created a lively interest in the Soviet people and their social system - a planned economy was no longer an unwork-

able anathema. And the entry of the prosperous and democratic USA, a country whose appeal lay in the myth of rapid advance not bounded by the restrictions of class and tradition, inspired the demand for greater opportunity and equality in the post-war world.[1]

Important too were the terms on which this war was being fought. Billed as a war against fascism, the growing consciousness of what fascism, a political ideology entailed, also called into question the real meaning of the ideologies that were being defended. It encouraged, in particular, the demand for a more genuine democracy, a democracy of the 'common people' that would not be contingent on the protection of the interests (or the values) of the past.[2]

This new radicalism, fostered by discussions wherever people came together, was given some political leverage by the growth in unionisation in war time. Trade union leaders worked with the Labour Party in planning Britain's programme of reconstruction, negotiating on both employment and welfare policy. The trade unions had accepted more radical principles in war-time, such as 'equal pay for equal work' in 1942 and 'the rate for the job' in preference to the family wage.[3]

1. See Addison (1977) for a detailed analysis of support for the war, and of the shift in popular opinion leftwards. Slater and Woodside (1951) in their study Patterns of Marriage recorded that 'Marxian ideas were common currency, in their working class respondents. 'There was a strong feeling in favour of the redistribution of wealth, and resentment at real or fancied exploitation and injustice, antagonism towards those with money, power or hereditary privelege.' (Slater & Woodside, 1951:254)

2. Charlotte Leutkins (1945) depicts the desire for a 'new democracy' that she thought women had formed through the experience of war.

3. From evidence to the Royal Commission on Equal Pay (1946:1044-6). At the end of the war, women's pay still averaged only 60% of men's.

But their primary concern was to protect their male membership from any loss in earnings or in work as a result of the production for war; a concern that was placed before the interests of the newly enrolled war workers. In giving evidence to the Royal Commission on Equal Pay, they stated that they would continue to promote demarcation agreements between men's and women's work till equal pay had been achieved, and stipulated full, government ensured employment, as a precondition.

This was not the only example of a new-found principle being postponed for the demands of the present, and in the long and hard period of reconstruction, the possibility of far-reaching change was quietly but thoroughly lost. In many ways, the organisation of war had set limits on re-organisation for peace. Some of the advances, particularly in women's employment, were clearly only 'for the duration' and were easily reversed when war-time production came to a close. Nevertheless, the pattern of women's employment had changed by the end of the war. Unskilled (and low-paid) factory and clerical work had replaced domestic service; more married women were working, though not if they had small children.[1] Celebrated for their contribution in war-time, women had gained more social status as a result of their efforts, but it was status with little material reward.

The war, in generating a new level of political awareness and in forcing a shift in relations at work, gave the family a new political importance.

1. International Labour Review (1951b) cited two surveys, carried out in 1943 and 1947. In 1943, it was found that 43% of women in war factories had children at home, and 13.5% had children under 5 years In July 1947, it was found that the number of married women with children in employment had dropped to 20%. This suggests that many women with children under 5 no longer had paid jobs.

As the war took an ever heavier toll, it was described more and more in terms of protecting what was near and dear in people's daily lives, and less in terms of defending freedom or democracy. It became a war for home and family: absent husbands and fathers were urged to fight in the name of wives and children at home; women in performing war-work, were praised for helping 'their men' [1] to win the war. Indeed, the whole land was pictured as a giant 'home front' standing united and resolute against the aggressor without. The threat that absent husbands and working wives posed to traditional family life was lessened by the assurance that this disruption had only to last 'for the duration'. Peace held the promise of an idealised family life, of privacy, security and warmth after the upheaval and suffering of war.[2]

This celebration of the sanctities of home, upset in war and to be protected in peace, fostered the expectation that family life would be harmonious and secure, once the war was won. In addition, the dislocation caused by war had generated a new awareness of the failings of family policy in the past. The evacuation experience had brought the severe deprivation of the urban poor to the attention of pressure groups, trade unions and the press.[3] In the words of H.C.Wells.

> 'Parasites and skin diseases, vicious habits and insanitary practices have been spread, as if in a passion of egalitarian propaganda, from the slums of such centres as Glasgow, London and Liverpool, throughout the length and breadth of the land."(Wells in Calder, 1971:43).

1. These sentiments were held right across the political spectrum. Even the Communist Party cited a strengthened family as a main aim of the war, as the many leaflets they published show. One issued by the Women's National Advisory Committee (nd) stated: 'War is the great destroyer of family life. We shall look to peace for the building of that happy and secure family life on which national happiness and security is based.'

2. See Slater & Woodside (1951).

3. See Calder (1971:35-50) for an enjoyable description of the evacuation experience. For a detailed analysis of the development of social policy in the Second World War see Titmus (1950).

The view that families, (and especially children), should be protected from the terrible trap of poverty, and not left to suffer, gained an ever wider currency, and support grew for a radical change in the provision of welfare by the state. In response to public pressure, and with the active co-operation of trade-unions, the government published the Beveridge Report in December 1942.[1]

The Beveridge Report met with a fantastic public response: it sold 630,000 copies within a week.[2] Beveridge accepted that mass unemployment and hardship were incompatible with democracy and freedom, or that the government should insure its citizens against their limited recurrence. A stable economy and full male employment (to be guaranteed, if necessary, by government legislation), were the preconditions of his plan, which was designed to secure a minimum standard of welfare for the whole population.

Beveridge identified the 'interruption or loss of earning power through unemployment, sickness, accident or death',[3] and the failure to relate family income to family needs, as the two main causes of poverty. His plan was designed to promote the health and wellbeing of the nation without undermining the will to work. Premised on full male employment, the benefits scheme for the unemployed was designed to provide limited support for those temporarily out of work.

1. This was published as The Report on Social Insurance and Allied Insurance. (Beveridge, 1942) A good summary of the Beveridge plan can be found in Cole (1942).

2. Figures from Price (1979). Sylvie Price, as well as showing the dependence of women that Beveridge entailed, gives a useful analysis of the response of women's organisations to Beveridge. See also Wilson (1980) for an analysis of the role of women enshrined in the Beveridge plan. She gives a very interesting account of thinking on the 'tired housewife'. (Wilson, 1980:19-32).

3. Beveridge quoted in Price (1979).

The Beveridge plan was built around the family, which was seen as comprising of a male breadwinner with dependent wife and children. Benefit, funded by contributions paid when in work, would be paid out to the unemployed husband (to cover the basic needs of man and wife living together, and supplemented by allowances for dependents), to the single parent, to men and women without families, and to pensioners. Wives were insured through their husbands, on whom they remained financially and legally dependent (and had no right to social security even if the marriage ended). Pregnant women and children also became eligible for benefit. Pregnant women were to be given a maternity grant, and maternity benefit for thirteen weeks if they had paid contributions at work. And the basic needs of children were to be met through the family allowances, which unlike other benefits, were paid out to mothers whether anyone in the family was earning or not. It was hoped that the continuous payment of family allowances would not deter the male worker with a large family from seeking work.[1]

The Beveridge plan denied women financial independence. Women were included in the plan as wives and mothers and, unlike men, were only entitled to state benefit in their own right if they were unmarried. In welfare, as in employment, women were far from equal. In the case of welfare, women's equality was not being 'postponed' till the economy improved. Instead, women's inequality was integral to the whole welfare system. After a war in which the protection of the family had played such a crucial ideological role, women were tied to the family anew, central but dependent, celebrated but trapped.

1. From Beveridge (1942: para 412) and quoted by Price (1979). Beveridge also hoped that his plan would remove some of the material insecurity that could be deterring women from having children.

Beveridge intended merely to improve the conditions of motherhood. His proposals were designed to relieve the hardship of family life, and make women's family responsibilities easier to bear. He hoped that this provision of some material security would make for better mothering and healthier children. And he conferred a new status on motherhood - an act for which he earned great praise. The plan was hailed as the 'Housewives Charter'.[1]

This perception of the Beveridge plan, by both women and men, can be traced to women's experience in war-time. Women's work in the war, whilst enhancing their perception of their own self-worth, did not necessarily instill the desire for equality with men. The focal concern, it would seem, was to achieve better conditions and greater recognition.

> "in the sphere where the role of men and women is different - the work concerned with the bearing and rearing of children, and the care of the home;" 2

for 'equality in difference' as it was later put. Ideas about what constituted better conditions varied. There were some who argued for wages for housework, and many campaigned for equal benefit for women and men, to be paid directly by the state. One group, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom,[3] did differ from other groups in taking particular issue with the dependent status of women that Beveridge was perpetuating. Locating this dependence not so much

1. See Price (1979) for a summary of the reception the Beveridge plan received.

2. This is taken from a report of the London Women's Conference on 'The Work and Status of the Housewife' that appeared in the Labour Woman, December 1943. It is quoted in Price (1979:7).

3. The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom was established in 1909 as a breakaway from the Women's Social and Political Union, a leading suffrage group. A non-party organisation, it campaigned for women's emancipation and for women's participation in social affairs.

in economics as in morality, they charged Beveridge, despite his claims to the contrary, with denying women any personal status within marriage. This group concluded their critique of Beveridge with this warning:

> "To continue to give women what seems to others to be good for them; to give indeed anything with an ulterior motive, be it the preservation of marriage and the family, or a rise in the birthrate - is doomed to failure. To respect women as individuals, to give them what is their right as citizens and workers, may, on the other hand, have great and beneficial effect far beyond any immediate object. For both security and progress are rooted in justice." 1

But they spoke before their time. The Communist Party also had a broader view of women's position in society. The Communist Party, to quote Tricia Davis, had 'gone beyond the consensus' in war-time, (Davis 1982:104) urging women to take on factory work, and leave the housework undone. She quotes from a party pamphlet published in 1944, that went so far as to suggest that the sexual division of labour had been profoundly altered by the war.

> "The country's ideas have had a good shake-up. A man's job and a woman's place haven't the same meaning as before. They take an equal share of the grime and the glory, the tears and the trials, to make this world a cleaner, safer and less selfish place to live in ..." 2

The position of women had changed within the party. As men had been conscripted away from their home areas, women had taken on not only their jobs, but also their party work. To quote Dorothy Thompson,

> "In the war, political organisations were run by women. The women were there and the women kept the party branches going, Labour as well as Communist. In so far as there were any politics, women were running it. (Interview).

The Communist Party's women's sections had also grown. In 1944, the National Association of Women was set up, and the paper Women Today was

1. Abbott, E and Bombas, K. (1943). The Woman Citizen and Social Security. London, n.p. Quoted in Price, (1979:10).

2. Pollitt, H. (1949). 'Political Report' in Report of the 21st National Congress of the Communist Party (1949:29), quoted by Davis 1982:94).

launched. A range of issues, covering both domestic and paid employment were debated here.

At the end of the war, women Communist Party members, while campaigning for better provisions for 'wives' and 'mothers', did not abandon their demands for paid work or equal pay. It was argued that female labour was badly needed to help ease the labour shortage, while equal pay was necessary to protect the levels of pay and indeed the jobs of the male working class. They were increasingly hampered though by the 'party line' vis-a-vis women and revolution. There was no place in party ideology for an autonomous women's movement. Instead, the Communist Party held to a unitary view of the working class as the agent of revolutionary change, and the Communist Party as the party to lead it. Women, far from organising on their own, should be standing 'shoulder to shoulder with their men'. This limited the links that could be made with other women and women's groups, and the kinds of campaigns that could be pursued. Paradoxically though, it could have insulated Communist Party women from the ideological tendency to define women in terms of their domestic responsibilities. It was not until 1954 that the Communist Party came to focus more or less exclusively not on women workers, but on women's special interest in peace.

## 'Let Us Face the Future', with Labour.[1]

The Labour Party went into the 1945 election on a programme of real but limited change. Full of praise for the people who had won this war, they were concerned to create the conditions that, unlike at the end of World War One, would ensure that the peace was truly theirs. Isolating the

1. This was the title of the Labour Party's 1945 election manifesto. (Labour Party, 1945).

concentration of economic power in the hands of too few men as the central cause of the 1930s depression, Labour's programme proposed that the state take over control of key areas of the economy and reconstruct Britain in the interests of all. 'We organised for war. Let's organise for peace'[1] was a central theme in Labour's campaign: the continuation and extension of state invervention and controls in peace-time would, they declared, make for the prosperity and wellbeing of the whole nation, and not just the capitalist class.

The changes brought by war, coupled with the new appreciation of the achievements of the Soviet planned economy and the scope of American freedom did, as we have seen, inspire a radical questioning both of British capitalism and of class privilege. Democracy and freedom had been redefined, to encompass increased state control on the one hand and greater class mobility on the other. Labour, in its manifesto, picked up and combined these concerns, pronouncing as its goal.

> "The establishment of the Socialist Commonwealth of Great Britain- free, democra tic, efficient, progressive, public-spirited, its material resources organised in the service of the British people."

Banished were to be the 'negative freedoms' of exploitation and low wages, for Labour would ensure work, prosperity and welfare for all (Labour Party, 1945:6).

Whilst promising to begin the task of building a socialist peace, the particular measures that were proposed in Let Us Face the Future were limited ones. On more radical ground, such as working for co-operation between the USA and the USSR, or facilitating workers' control in the industries to be nationalised, or controlling the far larger part of the economy that

1. This was the wording on a Labour Party election poster.

was to be left in private hands, the manifesto was far from concrete.[1] Drawn up by the party's right-wing national executive, and influenced more by official trade-unionism than by left-wing socialism, Labour's programme was a compromised one.[2] Indeed, its nationalisation proposals, in Ralph Miliband's assessment, were 'the least the Executive could present to the 1945 Conference without causing acute dissension in the Party', (Miliband, 1972:280), and the left, with the prospect of the forthcoming election, and in the belief that Let Us Face the Future represented merely the first stage in the construction of socialism, did not rebel.

However, Labour's policy, devised in the avowed belief that 'Socialism cannot come overnight',[3] meant in fact that socialism did not come at all. This programme was designed to intervene in capitalism just so far as was necessary to create the conditions for prosperity in the post-war

1. Labour's industrial programme focused on the need for greater productivity. Modernisation and efficiency were deemed essential to this, and Labour declared itself ready to pursue 'drastic policies of replanning' to this end. (Labour Party, 1945:4). Industries 'ripe' for nationalisation were those that were clearly suffering from multiple ownership, not only to their detriment, but to the detriment of other industries too. 'Other industries will benefit' the programme proclaimed, (and benefit they did, for the interests of private enterprise are not the same as the interests of British capital). The Labour Party did not suggest that an increasing number of industries would gradually come under the control of the state.

2. Arthur Marwick makes this point (1978). He argues that the upper class background of the Labour leadership had a crucial effect on their conception of state intervention. Steeped in the 'long liberal -democratic tradition of the right way of doing things' (1978:34), they could not in fact countenance long-term planning since they saw it as essentially undemocratic. They were left, despite their accurate assessment of the economic condition of the nation, in a dilemma between 'planning' and 'democracy' that they failed to resolve.

3. G.D.H.Cole, commenting on Labour's draft programme in 1949, makes a particularly clear statement about the expectations of socialists in 1945. 'The first five years, we thought, would have cleared the ground and got the foundations well and truly laid; and in the second term the Government would be able to go full speed ahead with the construction of the edifice of socialism.' (Cole, 1949:4).

world. For Labour, in its aim of 'spurring industry on', planned for efficiency and prosperity in a mixed economy, promising to bring stability to a system that generated crises if left to itself. The transformation of the economy was not on the cards. Indeed, this was dismissed on the grounds that, far from benefitting the economy, it would tie it up in 'red tape'.

The Labour Party manifesto also promised to provide for the welfare of the population, once the war was won. Some of the services of the Ministry of Food were to be continued, the housing programme was to go ahead apace, the Education Act was to be implemented, a National Health Service scheme was to be devised, maternity and child welfare schemes were to be extended whilst, through Beveridge, the whole population were insured 'against the rainy day'. The family was the institution around which these services were organised, and to which they were geared. (And maintaining the birth rate was one ulterior motive for trying to look after it at all well).[1]

The Labour Party won a massive victory in the 1945 election. Elected to office with a majority of 146 over all other parties, this, the first majority Labour Government in history, had the parliamentary strength to make its pledges law. It did just that, but no more.[2] Socialism was not 'just around the corner'. Neither, it rapidly transpired, was the end to the hardships and restrictions made necessary by war.

1. Government concern at Britain's declining birthrate had led to the setting up of the Royal Commission on Population in 1942. Women were, of course, under-represented in the new Government. In the 1945 election, 21 women MP's were elected - 5.3% of all MP's. This tiny proportion was higher than it has ever been, before or since. (See Stacey and Price, 1980:192). The gulf between the influence of women and men in political parties was, and is, very great indeed.

2. The Labour cabinet was not left-wing. Clement Attlee, Herbert Morrison and Hugh Dalton were all from upper class backgrounds and to the right of the party. Ernest Bevin, whilst he came from a trade-union background, made for a right-wing foreign secretary. Aneurin Bevan was the most noted left-wing minister, but the task of setting up the new National Health Service left him with little time for political campaigning.

Labour's provisions for family welfare were far too limited to ensure that the family be prosperous or indeed 'healthy' in the post-war world. Labour's plans to end the penalties of parenthood stopped short at relieving some of the worst features of family poverty - they could not transform the relationship between poverty and family size that had been so dramatically uncovered in war. The Labour Government remained unrealistic about family life and, as a range of studies disclosed wide-ranging difficulties in family living, including a number of government committees and reports, it failed either to revise its idealisation of the family, or to change its policies to advance its ideological aims.[1]

The family had not emerged unchanged at the end of the war. The insecurities and propaganda of the war years - and the difficulty of obtaining a divorce - all compounded to make the family appear more stable than it actually was. But concern at Britain's apparent failure to maintain a replacement level of population had one further effect: it brought an unusual amount of attention to bear on the family, and, particularly, on the experiences and expectations of women within them. It uncovered a degree of unhappiness and tension in family living that was far from removed from the prevalent ideology of domestic harmony and marital bliss.

The immediate source of this concern over population lay in the fact that in both 1940 and 1941, there had been a deficit in the number of births over deaths. Caused in the main by deaths in the air raids, this short-

1. As the family continued to change, the Morton Commission on Divorce was set up in 1951, and reported in 1956. (It was divided on whether breakdown of marriage was adequate ground for divorce). (see Cmnd 9678). Other reports included the Report on the Care of Children (1946) (Cmnd 6922) that looked into the provisions necessary for homeless and deprived children, and the Report of the Committee on Children and Young Persons (1960) (Cmnd 1191)

fall was made worse by the fact that the number of births had fallen in 1939, 1940 and 1941, whilst in 1941, infant and child mortality had risen. Fears that this represented the beginning of a downwards trend in births (and not, as it later transpired, merely a 'hiccup' in a trend upwards), alerted would be policy makers to the need for measures to encourage population growth.

In 1944 the government set up the Royal Commission on Population to consider the broad range of social, cultural, and biological factors that could effect Britain's birthrate. Using evidence submitted by a wide range of women's organisations, and conducting a 'family census' of its own, the commission deliberated for a total of five years on Britain's apparent failure to reproduce.[1]

The members of the commission shared the belief that the family was the only context within which a stable birthrate should be achieved. Troubled by the sharp increase in the number of illegitimate births in the later years of the war, they were as concerned with the rate (and survival) of marriage as with the rate of births. They saw the family as the central institution in a 'good society', and a 'good society' as a precondition for reproduction. Their conception of family relationships was, in essence, as traditional as their support of the family itself, with women responsible for childcare, (and men for financial support).

Policy makers and feminist advisers alike were affected by the family ideology that was so prevalent in the post-war years. Their attempts to disentangle the complex relationship between marital experience, state child-care provisions and family size could only have been complicated by their belief that the traditional family was, in essence, both

1. A total of twenty women's groups submitted evidence to the commission,

viable and 'strong'.

The commission was not blind to the real and distressing effects of motherhood. It uncovered many areas of need and dissatisfaction, and claimed that 'the price most women have to pay is too high'. It drew up recommendations to relieve mothers of some of the burdens that beset them. It called for an extended system of state aid - for home-helps, nursery schools and even rest-homes for mothers - and for changes in monetary, housing and welfare policy, all of which were still 'comparatively rudimentary' after four years of Labour rule.

Concern with population was widely expressed, and the Mass Observation unit sponsored their own study of its causes. They focused their investigations on women between the ages of twenty and forty five and their attitudes to and experiences of the family. Their report, published in 1945, gave invaluable information on how women saw their own family lives.

The Mass Observation team drew a gloomy picture of couples entering marriage with inadequate motives and forethought, to be both surprised and disappointed at what they found. As many as one in ten marriages were 'comparative failures' from the wife's point of view (and far more fell a long way short of being 'positive successes').[1] They found that 29% of women married between five and ten years saw serious disadvantages in their marriages, apart from the difficulties of war, and that between one in two and one in twenty women in all but the newly married groups thought they had been wrong in their reasons for marrying.

Having children was seldom a positive reason for marrying. 'One of the least adequately foreseen and planned for sides of married life', children

1. See Mass Observation (1945:67-72)

were often conceived when 'the bloom begins to wear off' in the hopes of 'holding a marriage together'. Women were having children for personal reasons, not social ones. Feeling negative and uninvolved in the society in which they lived, they felt reproduction to be a purely personal concern.

The Mass Observation team also drew up plans to lift the 'burdens of parenthood', combining these, interestingly, with proposals to educate the young into a better understanding of married life, and with a call to the government to face their responsibility for the social apathy that so many women felt.

Neither the commission's nor the Mass Observation team's recommendations were seriously taken up. The fear that the birthrate was set on a downward trend was rapidly proved groundless since, between 1941 and 1944, the births 'lost' between 1939 and 1941 had all been 'made up' and, between 1943 and 1948, the annual rates of births had been 'substantially in excess' of the pre-war rate. From 1945 on, the Government had stopped short of providing any relief for mothers. It terminated the childcare schemes that had enabled women to work in the war. In 1950, it placed a ban on the building of new nurseries. Women were having babies of their own accord, and it was no longer deemed necessary to provide any state aid. The state failed to make provision for domestic work. 'As a Daily Telegraph journalist put it in 1956: 'The welfare state is based on the drudgery of women'.' (Wilson, 1980:30).[1]

Other studies also investigated the experience of family life. Pearl Jephcott, in Rising Twenty,[2] interviewed teenage girls on their ideas

1. The complex relationship between the birthrate family welfare, and women's paid employment in the post-war period is discussed by Wilson (1980).

2. Pearl Jephcott interviewed 103 'working girls' aged between 17 and 21 in March 1945. They came from a pit village in County Durham, from the blitzed streets around Piccadilly, and from a northern industrial town. (Jephcott, 1948).

about marriage, before and after they were wed. Her study is a forceful indictment of family ideology, and 'romance'. The girls she interviewed coped with their limited opportunities by looking to early marriages as their 'real careers'. Fixed into a pattern of activities and expectations by the age of sixteen and a half and married, at the latest, by twenty four, they filled the intervening years by dreaming about their future wedding (and, so far as was possible, attending to the attributes thought necessary to achieve it).

For all that these young women's romantic hopes made their immediate lives easier to bear, Pearl Jephcott was firm in her belief that the cost was too high. Pre-empting any future outside marriage, this romanticism was an 'escape from an absence of thought' that accompanied their limited lives. In the 'disillusioned conviction that it is impossible to effect real improvement in the social order', (Jephcott, 1948:122), these girls sought meaning in their powerlessness and restricted existences not through protest but through dreams. Their very romanticism, whilst stunting their development in the present, did not foster but damage the possibility of happiness in the future. For they found themselves disillusioned and trapped, with no sense of their own identities or self-worth, before even the first year of marriage was out.

As other writers have argued, the family is very positively regarded in the tradition of British social democracy.[1] The Labour Party was concerned about the quality of family life in the post-war period, and the new welfare state was seen as giving positive help to the family. (Social work was developed with this aim in view). But the Labour Government's provision for family welfare fell short of its own aims. And Labour, given that it continued to propagate the romantic ideology of familial

1. See for example Wilson (1977); Rustin, (1982).

harmony and marital bliss, cannot escape some responsibility for encouraging false hopes - and ignoring broken dreams. For those families that were 'unsuccessful' could have expected far more from social policy. In dismantling state childcare schemes, in making inadequate provisions for family welfare, in failing to legislate for women's rights, Labour never came to grips with the problem of the 'tired housewife'.[1] At the end of Labour's term in office, many women must still have felt that 'politics' were remote from their everyday lives, and irrelevant to them.

## A Property-Owning Democracy?[2]

Women's equality and family welfare were not the only areas where Labour policy fell short of war-time dreams. The new Labour Government continued to promise that it would legislate for socialism, that its programme, focused currently on meeting the needs of the present, would lay the foundations for a socialist future. But the question of how far these 'two aspects' were integrated in Labour's programme was far from settled in the early post-war years. This question became more urgent as the Labour leadership lost any desire to experiment further with state control. In 1947, the Government decided to scrap plans for an economic general staff modelled on the war-time experience, that would co-ordinate the economy, and to call a halt to what it called 'totalitarian' planning, that would take industry out of private hands.[3] This did not mean that

1. Wilson (1980:19-40) describes the range of discussion about the 'tired housewife', and what to do to lessen (or legitimate) her burdens.

2. This phrase is taken from Labour Party (1950.)

3. See Economic Survey of 1947 (Cmnd 7046:5) quoted in Miliband (1972:290).

it was going to reduce the role of the state in the economy - in the face of continuing shortages and a growing deficit it could not do this - but that it was aiming merely to control the capitalist class, not to dispossess it.

The question of the implications of the Government's policy for socialism was taken up with some urgency by MP's on the left of the party. Looking with great concern to the worsening economic crisis of 1947, they argued forcibly that the state had to adopt more radical policies, not only in the name of a socialist future, but in the name of survival in the present.

These MP's formed a group, 'Keep Left', to press for socialist policies in the Parliamentary Labour Party in which the right were dominant, and, on occasion, to present their case outside it. They did not consider the position of women or family policy. They, in common with much of the left before and since, did not look at the relationship between the 'public' and the 'private' domains in any depth, or question male power. Early in 1947, they published what they called a 'Red Paper', Keep Left, to 'carry on where the government White Papers left off' (Crossman, 1947:1). In Keep Left, they located the causes of the current crisis in the Conservative mismanagement of the economy in the pre-war years, and on the cost of war. As the main, detrimental effects of this recent history they cited the obsolescence of much domestic industrial plant and Britain's dependence on dollars from the USA, a dependence that had become more profound in the early post-war years.

> "British industry, weakened by war, had to surrender pre-eminence to her great peace-time competitor, the USA. To pay for the American doctor, sick Britain had to pawn the furniture, sell her business and mortgage her home," (ibid:10)

they wrote. The aim of their programme was to retrieve Britain from the U.S.A. and in this retrieval, build socialism. They looked to the extension

of government policies: to greater comprehensiveness, co-ordination and urgency in planning; to the replacement of unnecessary jobs by necessary ones; to greater efficiency, through the rationalisation and standardisation of industry and the growth of industrial democracy.

This group issued their pamphlet in the belief that the Labour leadership were committed to a nationalisation programme extending beyond the basic industries, and would countenance more radical proposals in domestic (and foreign) affairs. However the Labour leadership, whilst it recognised the need for some new measures, had no intentions of further socialising the economy. Instead, it regarded an accelerated export drive, for dollars, as offering the only solution to this serious crisis. And they sought to step up exports by increasing industrial efficiency and productivity whilst leaving the relations of production unchanged.

The party executive recognised the importance of retaining popular support through a period of such hardship. It published a pamphlet, ABC of the Crisis, that explained the crisis and their plans in some detail.[1] This announced here that the government, in order to promote the production of exports that could be exchanged for dollars, would legislate for tighter controls over the supply of raw materials, industrial plant and consumer goods. It would, in addition, take measures to control the supply and the productivity of labour. Workers were to be directed to where they were most needed; working hours could be increased. And it encouraged, but did not legislate, for more consultation between workers

1. See Labour Party (1947a).

and management[1].

In the face of continuing shortages and old-fashioned plant, a rapid improvement in workers' efficiency was seen as the key element in Britain's recovery - the Government's first concern in these urgent times. But when the trade balance had been improved and the urgency had passed, the Labour leadership had quietly abandoned any notion of legislating for socialism. Indeed, Labour's goal was redefined to match its limited reforms: 'Social democracy' replaced 'Socialism' as Labour's special pledge over its next three years of rule. In the meantime, the Government called for 'every worker's increased efforts', albeit with the somewhat cold comfort that, harsh though these demands were, they did not compare with 'slavery under the fascists'.

The cold war did not cause, but did compound, Labour's difficulties. The building of socialism in Britain could not but be inhibited by the 'struggle against Communism' that came to dominate Western foreign policy in the last years of Labour's rule. The Conservative campaign to undermine the confidence of the Labour Government and lose it support, gained much ground; it had an effect even on the Labour leadership. In this campaign, Labour socialism was equated with Soviet Communism - and strongly condemned as a threat to Britain's security. The feared totalitarianism of the Soviet planned economy had already deterred the Labour leadership from adding to state powers; the charge that further socialist change would weaken 'National Security' nudged a hesitant Labour leadership off its still vaguely

1. The Control of Engagement Order was made on 18.9.47 and was to last till the end of 1948. It required that particular groups of workers go through a Labour Exchange when seeking or changing a job, so that they could be directed to the most suitable job. 'In the last resort' some workers would be directed to work away from home.

   It is interesting to note that those in managerial positions were excepted from the government's 'Control of Engagement' legislation.

socialist course. Neither analysing nor challenging the mooted relationship between socialism and insecurity, and, by implication, capitalism and strength, this Labour leadership spoke with pride of the special relationship that they had built with their American ally. And avoiding the responsibility that they shared for the rapid deterioration in relations between East and West, they redefined 'socialism' to match their compromised view.

By 1950, the Labour Party had redefined its goal to comply with this Government's limited achievements. Now, Labour promised a future with full (male) employment and a welfare state in a mixed economy.

In their 1950 election manifesto, Let Us Win Through Together, 'Work for All' had become the 'first thing' that Labour stood for (and their first 'Victory of Peace'). They described it rather glowingly as the cornerstone of their 'New Moral Order', where a wise and caring government would foster the development of a cultured and co-operative people. This Labour Government, the manifesto claimed, had freed the British people from the 'material bonds of capitalism' (bonds that the Conservatives, they warned, would re-tie). However, it was not the relations of exploitation and inequality under capitalism that constituted the people's bondage, but merely their most distressing effects. Labour, by providing for full employment and welfare, was lessening the degree of economic insecurity in people's lives, but not transforming the system to remove it altogether.

It would be too simple to say that the Labour Party when in office, abandoned its socialist principles in the face of forceful opposition, or indeed that it had never seriously intended to legislate for socialism at all. The Labour Party's failures were as much failures of imagination as renunciations of principle; failures of theory as much as intent.

Central to Labour's shift from socialism was the decision not to significantly extend its nationalisation programme. Completed (with the exception of iron and steel), by 1948, this programme had been the key feature in Labour's conception of the socialist reconstruction of Britain. In opting for a shorter rather than a longer 'shopping list'[1] of industries to be nationalised, the Labour leadership was in effect acknowledging that nationalisation was a dubious road to socialism, beset with drawbacks and disappointments and boding the growth of a bureaucratic and omnipresent state.[2] However, this acknowledgement did not result in a more realistic appraisal of the potential of 'socialist industries' in an essentially capitalist economy, nor indeed of how to create a genuinely socialist state. In Labour's manifesto for the 1950 election, an important shift had occurred in how nationalisation was conceived. This manifesto proposed that competitive public enterprise be established side by side with the private sector. This was legitimised not in terms of socialism but efficiency; indeed, it was efficiency that was rapidly becoming the raison d'etre for the whole public sector.

Labour's manifesto had been criticised by socialists on the left of the party, but without effect. The left had little influence in the party's executive, and had not succeeded in changing the manifesto at the Labour Party's Annual Conference. In 1949 G.D.H. Cole, the chairman of the Labour Party, published a pamphlet, commenting on the executive's draft

1. Industrial life insurance, sugar, cement, meat wholesaling and slaughtering, water, 'all suitable minerals', and, of course, iron and steel, were singled out for nationalisation. (Labour Party, 1949).

   How many industries should be nationalised was a central point of difference between left and right at this time. Whilst the right favoured only a limited extension of public ownership, the left argued that the list should be extended. Against the argument that efficiency should be the key criterion when assessing nationalisation, the left supported nationalisation as it transformed relations of economic power.

2. Discussion within the Labour Party on this theme included Laski (1948); Cole (1947); Cole (1952a).

programme, and whilst he did not succeed in changing Labour's manifesto, his attempt is worth looking at nonetheless.

Cole in his pamphlet spoke for the many socialists like himself in the party who, he believed, were not 'prepared to accept a half-way house on the road to socialism as a permanent abiding place'. He charged the Labour executive with placing this option before them, since 'Liberalism plus planning, with extended Social Security and more redestributive taxation' had become their limited and revised view of socialism. In Cole's view, this was Keynesian liberalism and not socialism at all.

Cole's depiction of the executive's 'socialism' accurately described what had already become the features of the leadership's policies. Their 'socialism', he maintained, proposed merely

> "A limited sphere of public enterprise, full employment policies to guard against slumps, low rates of interest, budget surpluses and deficits as means of keeping the economy on an even keel, and therewith a retention of the profit motive as the main driving force in industry and a continued reliance on the old incentives, despite their weakening by full employment and social security, to drive the labourer to do the job." (Cole, 1949:7-8).

Cole was a disappointed but not unsympathetic critic. He shared the executive's belief in the need for a period of 'consolidation'. Indeed, looking back he saw that the hopes he and fellow socialists shared in 1945 had been somewhat unrealistic. He thought they were completely unrealistic now:

> "For it is an indubitable fact that, whereas in 1945 a large part of the electorate had been stirred up by the unsettlement of war to consider changes in the very foundation of the social system, today most people's thoughts are mainly on such immediate things as food, housing, the prices of necessary goods and conventional necessaries, such as beer and tobacco, the irksomeness of continued austerity and 'controls' and in general on hopes that have been disappointed in a distracted world rather than on the very real gains that have come their way through full employment and greater social security. In effect, the main body of the electorate is feeling, not excited or enthusiastic, but tired of trying to understand the confused prospects of a world given over to unreason and already in danger of a war worse than the last. (Cole, 1949:5).

He still believed that support could be regained for socialism if the Labour Party was willing. But willing the executive was not. It was refusing both to improve the changes it had introduced, such as fostering greater worker's control in the nationalised industries, and to press ahead with new radical changes, such as the abolition of the House of Lords.

The 'Keep Left' group also attempted to radicalise Labour's proposed manifesto. A slightly changed group resumed discussions in the common belief that it was time 'to rethink whole policy in terms of socialism'.[1] They, like Cole, concluded that the time was not ripe for extensive further change. In Keeping Left, published in January 1950, their belief in the need for a period of consolidation had brought them closer to the executive's view, even to the extent of substituting 'social democracy' for 'socialism' as the more desirable description of Labour's goal. Their relative leftness was based on their conception of how far 'social democracy' should go. They did propose a longer 'shopping list' of companies for nationalisation, although the reason why nationalisation was necessary was slipping from view. With the claim that the government 'already possesses on paper most of the powers it requires to create the framework for a socialist community', (NS&N, 1950:5-6) they focused less on the dispossession of the capitalist class, and more on the extension of a democratic system of control.

> "We are now less concerned about who owns a factory, and more about who manages it and how, and whether it is working according to socialist plans,"( NS&N, 1950:28).

they wrote. For them, the identification between public ownership and democratic control had been proved 'wrong and outdated'; private ownership

1. NS and N (1950).

and socialist production could go hand in hand.

Whilst they varied in their conceptions of how far socialism had come, those on the left of the party did still look to further change. They believed that the 1945 Labour Government had intended to secure only an instalment of socialism, and that the programme would be extended over subsequent terms in office till socialism was achieved. However, Labour's official programme had become so restricted that some left-wingers had joined with Cole in questioning whether the leadership were still committed to making further socialist advances (for, despite the limitations of Let Us Face the Future, they did generally believe that in 1945 it had been).

Labour did not fare particularly well in the 1950 election. Whilst it secured more votes than in 1945, its percentage of the poll had fallen. The effect was that the Labour Party all but lost its parliamentary majority: in March 1950, it was returned to office with an overall majority of 6.[1]

Labour's new term was tortured and brief. Promised legislation was set aside till a larger majority could be secured. Demoralised and lacking direction, the difficulties of this government were compounded by the outbreak of war in Korea. As fighting there threatened to escalate into a full-scale war, Attlee authorised massive increases in arms spending, to be funded by cutting back on the welfare state. He was faced now with more effective opposition from his own left-wing. Aneurin Bevan, Harold Wilson and John Freeman resigned from the government in protest, an act which, while it did not succeed in forcing a change in policy, was to have a profound effect on Labour politics. For Bevan was to become the

1. See Miliband (1972:309) for voting figures in this election.

leader of the party's disenchanted but unorganised left, much to the consternation of the party's powerful right-wing. Indeed, Bevan's resignation had the effect of uniting not only the left but the right, who felt their easy dominance to be seriously threatened. The right attempted to undermine the potential influence of the Bevanites by appealing to the loyalty of party members - a tactic that bore some fruit in the period immediately preceding the Election that Attlee announced for the Autumn, but that failed when the Government was defeated at the polls.

Labour's manifesto for the 1951 election was an even more muted version of the one before.[1] In the wake of the Korean war, this manifesto laid greater emphasis than the last on the need for peace, to be preserved, Labour proposed, by arms and the Western Alliance, and, interestingly, by a more enlightened colonial policy. The Conservative Party was depicted as threatening Labour's achievements: a Tory Government, the Labour manifesto claimed, would end full employment and dismantle the welfare state and, the chances were, lead the country into war. These charges did not go unheaded. Labour secured 48.8% of the vote, compared with the Conservative 48%. But Labour did not win the election. Losing twenty-one seats to the Conservatives, the Labour Party was not to be returned to office for another thirteen years.

1. Labour Party (1951).

2. Figures from Miliband (1972:317).

# CHAPTER 2

## FROM WARINESS TO KOREA. LABOUR'S FOREIGN POLICY AND THE LABOUR LEFT, COMMUNIST AND PACIFIST OPPOSITIONS

Whilst any assessment of Labour's record in office has to take account of the very real difficulties that the rapid deterioration in relations between East and West presented to a Government committed to at least some measure of socialist change, the enthusiasm with which the Labour leadership aligned itself to the USA cannot be explained purely in terms of the pressures of the times. Bevin, Labour's Foreign Minister, was quick to take sides as tension worsened, denouncing the USSR and supporting the USA in terms that befitted any cold warrior - and, as we shall see, angered the labour and communist left.[1] Labour's failure to generate a socialist foreign policy was the more disappointing as this had been the apparent intention of the government on coming to office. Then, Labour had promised to "mediate between Capitalist America and Soviet Russia, and play the leading role in achieving real collaboration between East and West" (NS and N, 1950:18).

The economic and military relations between the USSR, Britain and the USA were far from equitable or stable when Labour came to power. Allies in the latter part of World War Two, co-operation between the USSR, Britain and the USA had not extended beyond the minimum demands of military expediency, and the costs of war had not been equally shared. Britain and

1. Bevin, speaking to the cabinet in March 1948, defended the government's foreign policy by saying: "It has really become a matter of the defence of Western civilisation or everyone will be swamped by this Soviet method of infiltration. Unless positive and vigorous steps are taken it may well be that within the next few months, or even weeks, the Soviet Union will gain the political and strategic advantages which will set the great Communist machine in action, leading to the establishment of World Dictatorship or to the collapse of organised society over great stretches of the globe." (Bevin quoted in Gowing (1974:214)).

the USSR had paid heavily for the defeat of Germany, whilst American losses had been slight and the American economy had flourished. And whilst Labour was promising to introduce an unpartisan foreign policy, Hiroshima and Nagasaki were suddenly devastated by a new and terrible weapon - the atom bomb - a weapon that rested exclusively in America's possession and control.

Despite this glaring imbalance in the wealth of nations, the Labour Government still held that peace was possible. It placed its hopes in the newly formed United Nations Organisation, convinced that this could become a forum for genuine understanding and co-operation, and thereby peace. It formulated proposals for international 'collective security' to reduce the extent of national re-armament whilst guaranteeing adequate national defence. It quickly became evident however that the United Nations could not resolve the divergent interests of different nation states, and hopes for understanding and peace were quickly overtaken by fears of conflict and war.

The British Isles were felt to be particularly vulnerable to attack, by conventional and by atomic weapons. Defence, it rapidly transpired, was not to wait on reconstruction nor on the attainment of collective security through negotiated agreements with other powers. Selected ministers conferred with Clement Attlee (the new Prime Minister) and Ernest Bevin (Foreign Secretary) and decided, in the greatest secrecy, that Britain should develop its own atomic bomb: an independent deterrent that would be commensurate with Britain's status as a 'great power'. As there was no effective agency to prevent proliferation, and as the only apparent defence against atomic weapons was to threaten to use them yourself, these ministers agreed that Britain 'could not afford to acquiesce in an American

monopoly'[1] (particularly since America was not yet committed to come to Britain's defence), and not build bombs of its own. Between January 1947, when this decision was taken, and May 1948, when it was quietly announced in Parliament, this secret programme set to the task of developing an airstriking force equipped with an atomic bomb.[2]

In addition, these defence staff saw 'first use' (of atomic weapons against a conventional attack) as 'a cardinal principle' of deterrence policy; the credibility of deterrence being founded, paradoxically, on the readiness to initiate a nuclear attack.

Within a year, the excessive secrecy surrounding the project had become both an impediment and a liability. On the 12th May 1948, this brief exchange took place in an unprepared Parliament:

> "Mr George Jeger asked the Minister of Defence whether he is satisfied that adequate progress is being made in the development of the most modern types of weapon.
>
> The Minister for Defence (Mr A.V.Alexander): Yes, Sir. As was made clear in the Statement relating to Defence 1948 (Command 7327), research and development continue to receive the highest priority in the defence field, and all types of weapons, including atomic weapons, are being developed." (Hansard quoted in Gowing, 1974:212). 3

The ministers who had set Britain on this course did not foresee the rapid advances in technology that would make arms production and delivery ever more sophisticated and costly, and would give the arms race a 'remorseless logic' of its own. And in so far as they did foresee some

1. Bevin quoted in Gowing (1974:183). Margaret Gowing was commissioned by the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority to write the official history of Britain's atomic programme. Written with free access to official documents, this is the most comprehensive account of the authority's policy making. I owe to this my description of the government's decision to manufacture the atomic bomb.

2. Gowing (1972:184) argues that the decision to manufacture a bomb was not made in response to an immediate military threat. In part, it was based on the feeling that 'Britain as a great power must acquire all major new weapons'.

3. See Gowing (1972:212-3).

developments in the future, they believed that Britain, as a technologically advanced power, would be able to 'keep up'.

The decision to build the British bomb was taken at a time of very little debate on the subject of atomic weapons, and in a climate of general resignation to their development and their use. The Mass Observation team had found, in December 1946, that 60% of their sample thought that war was likely in 25 years, and 75% that atom bombs would be used if war did break out.[1] They described this as the 'majority expectation of the worst' and a feature of the prevailing social apathy under Labour.

Despite considerable pressure within the Parliamentary Labour Party to remain silent on the subject of the bomb,[2] several left wingers did take issue with the direction of Labour's foreign and defence policy. The 'Keep Left' group, concerned both by the Government's complicity in the polarisation of East and West, and by the possibility of nuclear proliferation, published a pamphlet of warning.[3] In this the political objection, that democracy was being 'mercilessly squeezed out' 'between the Communist and anti-Communist blocs' was coupled with a military one; 'no European nation will be any safer for taking shelter in either an anti-American or anti-Russian bloc'. They argued for a federation of East and West Europe which would attempt to develop a Security Pact

> "... and announce our readiness, along with other European nations, to renounce the manufacture and use of atomic bombs and to submit our armed forces and armament factories to inspection of U.N.O., irrespective of whether Russia and America reach agreement on this subject or not ... our security depends not on winning the next-atomic-war, but on preventing it. A United Europe, strong enough

1. See Mass Observation (1947).

2. See Gowing (1974:184). She describes it as the 'big unmentionable subject' in the Labour Party. Even the left remained strangely quiet about it.

3. Crossman (1947).

> to deter an aggressor, but voluntarily renouncing the most deadly offensive weapon of modern warfare, would be the best guarantor of world peace".(Crossman, 1947:41).

Their warning was answered by a Labour leadership whose growing fear of war lent urgency to their pursuit of an effective 'collective security', but whose anger about Soviet foreign policy was driving them to seek this with the USA.[1] Although they still maintained that only the United Nations could guarantee peace, worldwide, and although they would continue to fight for an effective disarmament plan within the United Nations, they were placing Britain under American military 'protection' for the foreseeable future.

As the cold war grew colder, some labour left-wingers abandoned their position. In 'Keeping Left', the second and last publication of the 'Keep Left' group before they became the 'Bevanites', their fear of atomic weapons had been overrided by the fear that Soviet Communism may indeed want to 'conquer the world'. Firmly won over to the Western view that 'the aggresive development of Soviet Communism has sharpened the division between the Soviet and non-Soviet states', (NS and N, 1950:44) they looked to the Atlantic Pact, and no longer to a United Europe, for protection. Their socialism now rested in the belief that military strength could not offer sufficient defence against the force of marxism's ideological appeal to the disadvantaged and discontented, and they put forward a programme for social harmony as the first - though clearly not the only - line of defence.

Meanwhile the American leadership made sure that they kept ahead in the atomic arms race. The Soviet claim on the 28th of January, 1950, that they had achieved atomic parity with the USA was followed, three days

1. See Labour Party (1947b).

later, by President Truman's announcement that the US Atomic Energy Commission were to go ahead with the production of the 'hydrogen' or 'super-bomb'. As the cold war worsened, Labour Party dissidents were at a loss as to how Britain could avoid either being swallowed up into the American camp - or being left undefended. Even Labour's programme of democratic socialism in Britain - the programme that was the central feature of Britain's supposed 'moral inspiration' for peace in the world - did not stand up to the worsening pressures of the cold war. In the words of G.D.H.Cole,

> "... the problem confronting western Socialism today is simply this - can it meet the challenge of Communism without accepting the philosophy of Americanism as a substitute for its lost ideals? I do not know the answer: I only know that I feel lonely and near despair in a world in which Socialist values as I understand them are being remorselessly crushed out between the two immense grinding-stones of Communist autocratic centralism and hysterical American worship of wealth and hugeness for their own sake and not as means to that human fellowship which lies at the very foundation of the Socialist faith." (Cole, 1952b:32).

The outbreak of war in Korea marked a new stage in the worsening cold war. On June 25th 1950, the United Nations Commission in South Korea reported that Communist forces had invaded from the North. On the North Korean refusal to withdraw, the U.N.'s Security Council, in the continuing absence of the Soviet Union, voted to send troops under American command to aid the South.[1] The Pentagon panicked. The belief that 'Korean aggression was merely the first in a series of Communist thrusts'[2] which, by 1954, would lead the USA into war against the USSR, induced a feverish drive to build up the military both in the USA and in Europe. The race for military superiority had reached such a pitch that any appeal for Western arms limitation was seen as playing into Communist hands.

1. See Brockway (1963) and Morris and Ervin (1970).

2. Bevan et al (1954:6).

The Labour Government in Britain was infected by the panic, increasing military expenditure at America's behest and capitulating to American pressure to rearm Germany. There was protest in the Labour Party on both counts. We have already noted how Aneurin Bevan, Harold Wilson and John Freeman resigned from the Government in April 1951, taking a stand against the reintroduction of health service charges deemed necessary to pay for the increased rearmament bill.[1] In March 1952, when Labour was in opposition, 57 'Bevanite' MP's defied the Party Whip and voted against the Conservatives' defence budget on the grounds that though reduced, it was still too large. The Parliamentary Labour Party, concerned by the considerable support for further cuts in arms spending rapidly took action to undermine this opposition. It imposed a ban on all unofficial groups within the Labour Party, hampering though by no means obliterating opposition to official defence policy in the years to come.[2]

Plans for the rearmament of Germany went ahead unchanged, meeting with some opposition from the Labour Party but none from the Labour leadership. At first, the Parliamentary Labour Party had laid down conditions for German rearmament, conditions which the majority saw ... 'as a method of putting off the application of a principle they believed to be fundamentally wrong' (Bevan, 1954:6). But in the panic over Korea, some MP's such as Hugh Gaitskell and Herbert Morrison, came to support German rearmament, following the Pentagon in their belief that an unarmed Germany represented a 'gaping hole in the line' of European defences. In September, 1951, in the heat of the election campaign, Morrison quietly committed Britain to the American inspired 'European Defence

1. See Chapter 1.

2. See Milliband (1972:324-326).

Community' in which a German militia would play a full role.

When Labour was out of office, various compromise formulae on German rearmament were passed at annual conferences, the most important of which was the unanimous decision that the Government should make further efforts to secure German unity and only proceed with German rearmament if these efforts failed. However, when met with uncompromising American resistance, the Labour leadership let even this resolution go. Opponents continued to speak out against this, arguing that efforts should still be made to achieve German unity through negotiation. Indeed, they saw German unity as offering the only possibility of peaceful co-existence since the alternative - an armed and divided Germany - would inevitably lead to the Third World War. But their perception of how this could be achieved was not as radical as their sense of the terrible cost of failure. Perhaps for them, too, socialist values had been 'crushed', to cite Cole. They did not demand that the Labour Party lead Britain out of N.A.T.O. or unilaterally renounce nuclear weapons. They called, instead, for a gradualist programme, focused on high level talks between the USSR, the USA and Britain.[1]

## The Communist Party's Opposition to Labour's Policies

Whilst left-wingers in the Labour Party were gradually compromised over British membership of the American camp, communists were far stronger in their denunciation of the Labour Party's line. Angered that the Labour Government had reneged on its promise of friendship with the USSR, the Communist Party placed the responsibility for worsening relations firmly on the Western side and campaigned ever more stridantly for the defence of the USSR. But this was a period of decline and disappointment for the

1. Bevan et al (1954).

Communist Party in Britain after its ascendence and popularity in the 1930s and years of war. Faced with a massive failure in the 1945 General Election, the Communist Party could only hope to attain political influence by winning support for its policies in the Labour Party: not an easy task given the right-wing nature of the Labour Party leadership and lack of influence and indeed coherence of the labour left.

The Communist Party badly misjudged the political situation at the end of the war. In the belief that Churchill would win the 1945 election, the Communist Party proposed that its successful candidates would form an alliance with Labour (and perhaps with the Conservatives too), giving the Communist Party its long-sought influence on Parliamentary policy both at home and abroad.[1] Rejected by the victorious Labour Party, and winning only two M.P's of its own, the Communist Party's executive committee called on the party's members to work actively in support of the Labour Government: if the unity of 'Labour, Communist and Progressive Forces' could be secured then Britain could have a socialist Government yet.[2] However the attitude of communists to the Labour Party was not as unproblematic as this call for common work would suggest. Critical voices were raised at the party's 18th Congress about the lack of clarity in the Communist Party vis-a-vis the new Labour Government and indeed the Labour Party itself.[3] Pollitt, the General Secretary of the Communist Party, sought to clarify the situation in March 1946 by stating that the Communist Party had decided to seek affiliation to the Labour Party.[4] However this goal, never remotely shared with the national executive committee of the Labour Party was to become increasingly problematic for the Communist Party itself.

1. See Pelling (1975:130-131) and Birchall (1974:33).
2. See Communist Party (1945a).
3. Communist Party(1945b)
4. See Pollitt (1946).

The Communist Party did not restrict its criticism of the Labour Government to its foreign and defence policy; it also took issue with its performance at home. Its opposition to Labour's domestic policy was based on a traditional marxist view that the contradictions within capitalism are unsolvable - and that the system is doomed. Any attempt to construct a social-democratic 'middle way' as a way out of crisis consisted, in practice, of compromise with 'big business' - and merely delayed the system's collapse. The Communist Party saw the crisis of 1947 and Labour's response to it in just these terms.[1] And it proposed a radically different 'solution', a solution that would so alter the priorities of capitalism that it could/not survive. To this end, it deliberately demanded the impossible of capitalism (it 'promised miracles' to use Labour's phrase), and not without some effect. In 1947-8, following five years of steady decline, the Communist Party's membership did temporarily increase.[2]

As the cold war worsened, the criticisms that the Communist Party directed at the Labour leadership for attempting to rescue a dying system were incorporated into the campaign for peace. Equating Communism - and the USSR and Eastern Europe - with democracy, progress and peace, the Communist Party set about warning the British people that the Government's current policies would lead them into ever-worsening capitalist crises and an American war. In addition, they charged the Labour Government with pursuing an imperialist policy of its own making; a charge for which they had several targets since, in 1947, there were British troops in India, Greece, Egypt and Palestine. So real did they regard the danger that by February 1948

> "... the fight for peace has now become a burning issue not only for the Communist Party, but for the whole working class, and especially ex-Service men and women, young people and the women." (Pollitt 1948:45).

1. Communist Party (1947).

2. See Pelling (1975:192-3) for official figures of party membership.

This campaign could not but further isolate the Communist Party from the Labour leadership. In October 1947, the newly formed Communist Information Bureau (the Cominform) had declared that

> "Two camps came into being, the imperialist anti-democratic camp with the basic aim of establishing world domination of American imperialism and routing democracy, and the anti-imperialist democratic camp with the basic aim of disrupting imperialism, strengthening democracy, and eliminating the remnants of Fascism."1

Pollitt made no bones about placing the Labour Government firmly in the imperialist camp.

The peace campaign was of particular importance to the Communist Party since it hoped that through this, the party would be able to win support from the 'unpolitical' - from youth, and, particularly, from women. The recruitment of women who do not have waged work is a perennial problem for any political organisation (even though few have regarded the isolation of women in the home as a political problem in itself). 'Peace', transcending as it did the politics of work, proved to be a particularly suitable issue on which to appeal to women to join the party.

The implementation of the Marshall Plan (an American aid programme that required receiving countries to trade in dollars), provoked a very hostile response from national Communist Parties. Fiercely opposed by the Soviet Union, the Marshall Plan was resisted by Communist Parties in Britain and Europe on the grounds that it represented 'dollar imperialism'. Bevin was taken to task by the British Communist Party for arguing in January 1948 that 'there is no political motive behind the Marshall offer other than the over-riding human motive to help Europe help herself'. Its real

1. WN and V (10.10. 1947:463). The Cominform was an organisation of representatives from the Soviet and East European Communist Parties, and from the French and Italian Parties.

purpose, the Communist Party maintained, was to "build up a Western bloc war base against the SU and the new democracies, with politically subservient Governments in each of the Marshall Countries".[1]

In December 1949, these fears that economic dependence implied military unity were confirmed when the majority of the European powers, Canada and the USA joined their military forces in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, an organisation pledged to the military resistance of the USSR.[2]

The polarisation of the world into two hostile and fearful camps led to the repression and indeed the victimisation of dissent in both. Communists in the West found it increasingly difficult to gain a fair hearing and to win support for their arguments, be they for socialism in their own countries or friendship with the USSR. The British Communist Party responded aggressively. Pollitt, the party's general secretary, called on party members to foment a movement of mass opposition to the Labour Government, a movement that would be led by a communist vanguard, and that would succeed where other left organisations - such as the 'Keep Left' group - had failed. In the coming election, 100 Communists were to stand against right-wing Labour candidates, in a massive attempt to purge Parliament of right-wing Labour MP's and oust the party's leadership.[3] In its election manifesto, the Communist Party ruthlessly attacked the Labour leadership's 'mixed economy' at home, and imperialist and pro-American policy abroad, proposing in their stead a programme for rising living standards and 'socialist nationalisation', and for trade and foreign policy that would no longer exclude the Soviet and East European world. (Communist Party, 1949d). The result was disastrous. Both the Communist

1. Communist Party (1949a).

2. See Horowitz (1969) for a detailed account of American foreign policy from 1945 to 1967. See pp. 262 - 264 on NATO, pp. 70-75; 83; 85 on the Marshall plan.

3. See Pollitt (1949).

MP's lost their seats, and all but three candidates lost their deposits; British Communism, as we shall see, was due for a (Soviet directed) change of course.

By 1949, the Communist Party had already begun to lose the members that it had gained the year before. However, disappointed socialists were with Labour, the growing sectarianism of the Communist Party worked against the recruitment of new members, or any increase in popular support. The vigour with which the Communist Party denounced the 'Capitalist West' and celebrated the 'Communist East' did little to counter the anti-Communist view that a 'Britian Free and Independent' was merely a synonym for Soviet-style rule. This view could only have been reinforced by the British Communist Party leadership's apparent lack of autonomy from Moscow, and by the lack of democracy in the British party itself.[1]

The party's lack of autonomy was evidenced, firstly, by the leadership's failure to make any independent assessment of the Soviet-conducted purges of 'enemies within'. Instead they gave their support to Soviet actions. Pollitt, in his political report to the 21st Congress, cited the evidence of the Rajk Trial in Hungary to condemn both Rajk and Tito as traitors of socialism.[2] They were, he maintained,the agents of capitalist imperialism, fomenting counter-revolution in the newly created 'People's Democracies'. And the leadership's judgement was echoed by the congress as a whole. The proceedings of the congress recorded much praise for Stalin and his success in 'smashing the agents of imperialism', the 'Trotskyites and Wreckers'. They reinforced Pollitt's judgement that this action could only strengthen the 'camp of peace'.[3]

1. See Pelling (1975:160) for a description of how the party leadership claimed more and more power.

2. Communist Party (1949b:19).

3. Communist Party (1949c).

The British Communist Party's lack of autonomy was evidenced, secondly, by the revisions that were made to party policy following their bad election defeat. In July, 1950, Pollitt reported to the party's executive on their need to face up to the mistakes they could have avoided, if they had paid greater attention to the statements issued by the Central Information Bureau, or Cominform.[1] They had failed, firstly, to lay sufficient emphasis on the campaign for 'national independence' that the Cominform was promoting. This campaign sought to undermine the strength of the American camp by fostering the demand for autonomy from it. It was integral to the Communist parties' campaign for peace, which, as we shall see, became their predominant campaign in the early 1950s.

Their second mistake concerned the relation of the Communist Party to the labour movement. Pollitt argued that the Communist Party's vigorous denunciation of the Labour Party leadership before the election had misfired, resulting not in the party's greater influence in the rank and file, but in its greater isolation. Now the time had come for the party to change its sights. They should no longer look to a split between left and right in the Labour Party, but should work for 'unity in action' instead. Whilst this did not entail supporting the right-wing leadership, it was a significant shift in emphasis nonetheless. Labour's very much reduced majority at the 1950 election made the possibility of a Conservative or coalition Government in the near future very real, and it was this eventuality that the Communist Party was concerned to prevent. This recognition of the importance of producing a programme that was more closely geared to British conditions represented, then, not the British Communist Party's autonomy from Moscow, but its continued subservience. And by supporting the Cominform's call for increased vigilance against dissenters from the party line, the British leadership showed itself to be Stalinist, through and through.

1. Communist Party (1950). Pollitt ended this report with a long quote from the Cominform which called for increased vigilence against the 'Tito-Rankovic spy clique'.

The need for a change to a more popular policy was made far more urgent by the escalation of war in Korea. In January 1951, the British party responded to this need by publishing The British Road to Socialism, the programme that was said to give full recognition to specifically British conditions.[1] What the membership and the public did not know was that Stalin himself was author of parts of the 'British Road'.

In this programme, 'national independence', for Britain, had become the Communist Party's over-riding goal. It was the key concept in the Communist Party's depiction of political change in both domestic and foreign policy. Their programme for changes at home - for increased nationalisation, a planned economy, better welfare and a more democratic state-were said to provide for both greater freedom and prosperity. These changes were integrated into a non-partisan foreign policy, that would allow the removal of trade barriers and reductions in defence spending. Together, they would greatly increase Britain's wealth. Their programme for foreign policy comprised, as before, Britain's withdrawal from NATO and the colonies, and a policy of co-operation with the 'Great Powers'. It was described as a 'policy of peace', The Communist Party proposed, in addition, that these goals be achieved through the transformation of that specifically British institution, Parliament: the Communist Party no longer believed in creating 'Soviets' in Britain.

Right through the 1950s, 'peace' was the major concern of Communist Parties in Britain and in Europe. Loaded as it was with support for the Soviet Union and independence from the USA, it became the focus for all

1. Communist Party (1951). The British Road to Socialism was the party's major policy document until the revised text was published in 1957. Edward Thompson (interview) told me how, in 1956, it came out that a section on the British socialist commonwealth of nations had been inserted by Stalin.

that is good. Democracy, culture, progress and Communism were presented as the just rewards of a peace-orientated society; fascism, decadence, and crises as the unavoidable consequences of the capitalist preparation for war. Much was made of the unequal effects of the massive costs of arms. Whereas in the prosperous USA, arms spending was delaying capitalist crises by providing a channel for industrial over-production, in Britain and Europe national crises were being hastened by the severe restrictions that an unrecovered industrial sector still had to face. As an immediate effect, the welfare services, and the standard of living of the working class, were suffering.

The organisations of the peace campaign were many. Formed in the main after the Cominform conference in 1948, they encompassed the National Friendship Societies with East European countries and the USSR; the World Peace Congress and the Women's International Democratic Federation; the British Peace Committee and the National Assembly of Women. Although they were not official Communist Party organisations, they were seen and treated as such and, proscribed by Transport House, they did operate largely under Communist Party control.[1]

There was, nonetheless, some local variation in how autonomous the peace groups were. Edward Thompson, who was very active in the local Yorkshire group, the Yorkshire Peace Alliance, maintains that this was a genuine alliance of Communists, Labour Party supporters, Christians and others, and that the Communist Party members were never once accused of manipulating the organisation for their own ends. As evidence of this, Thompson described to me the storm that erupted when the Communist Party appointed Bill Wainwright, the National Organiser of the Communist Party,

1. See Pelling (1975:146-7).

as the new secretary of the British Communist Party. Following his appointment, Bill Wainwright requested a session with the Communist Party cadre in the Yorkshire Peace Alliance, a session that was refused on the grounds that he should speak openly with the whole alliance, and not secretly to a group within it.[1]

The purpose of the Communist Party's Peace Movement was to secure international talks for disarmament at Governmental level. The CP, though it did claim that 'in the last resort, peace depends on the people',[2] was concerned, for the indefinite future, to win the opposition of 'the people' to the 'H bomb men', in the hope that this would have some effect in forcing the leaders of Britain, France and America around the conference table with the USSR and China. By alerting the British people to the dangers of nuclear weapons, they hoped to influence the government's international role. The party was not interested in Britain stepping outside the international arena or disarming alone.

Whilst the United Nations Organisations still promised to be the most appropriate forum for such discussions, none of the proposals for disarmament talks that the USSR had made had been seriously taken up. In addition, the newly formed People's Republic of China was refused entry to the UN and the USSR, hoping to gain a much wanted ally, boycotted the Security Council of the UN in protest. As the arms race went on

1. Edward Thompson (interview). This storm was finally quieted by the compromise that Bill Wainwright would talk first with the Federation of West Yorkshire Peace Committee's Committee, and then with the communists within it.

   As evidence of Communist control of the World Council for Peace, Edward Thompson cited the case of Dorothy Greenald who, whilst a non-Communist Party member, had been made a member of the World Council for Peace. When she spoke out too strongly against Communist politics, she was quietly removed.

2. WN and V (5.12.1953).

apace, the USA answering the Soviet claim of atomic parity in January 1950 by authorising the production of the H bomb, the 'World Peace Congress' launched the Stockholm Appeal in an attempt to influence the UN from outside.

The Stockholm Appeal was addressed to the governments of the '5 Great Powers'. It asked them to come together in the United Nations to secure

1. The prohibition of all atomic weapons with international control and inspection.

2. A declaration that the first nation to use atomic weapons be branded as a war criminal.

3. The all-round reduction of armaments by international agreement. 1

As signatories were collected 'from the United States to Australia, from Great Britain to Japan', and particularly from East Europe, China and the USSR, the petition was heralded as an

> "International Referendum, in the course of which the citizens of the world will vote for peace against war, for friendship between the people against the aggressors threatening the world with the atom bomb." 2

With the outbreak of war in Korea, collecting signatures for the Stockholm Appeal became the 'primary task' for members everywhere. (A massive five million signatures were collected in all). The drive for peace became a propaganda war. Western rearmament was repeatedly attacked under the banners of 'defence', 'prosperity' and 'freedom'. It was graphically depicted as the costly road to an atomic war that would devastate Britain.[3]

1. Daily Worker (5.4.50).

2. W.N and V (27.5.50:1).

3. This petition was superceded by the 'Five Powers Peace Pact Appeal' - another petition which this time lay down no specific conditions in its request for international talks, except that Communist China be included.

   The CP's peace campaign did meet with considerable setbacks. Beyond attacks in the press, it was also subject to some direct repression. One example of this was the ban the Home Office placed on granting entry visas to foreign delegates attending the second World Peace Congress, to be held in Sheffield in November 1950. (See D.W. 10.11.50).

The CP did hope that the campaign for peace would help foster unity with other left groups, and that it would win support for Communism. It appealed to women, in particular, linking their traditional concern for peace to their daily struggle to make ends meet, a struggle that could only get worse with the rising cost of arms. As the Korean war intensified, CP members approached women who were most directly affected; the working class wives of the soldiers and prisoners of war; the wives of the reservists and drew them into the locally organised committees. They did have some success, and in 1951, with the claim that women were in the 'forefront' of the peace campaign, the CP's National Women's Advisory Council decided to set up the National Assembly of Women in the hope of extending the number of women they reached.[1]

The National Assembly of Women grew quickly. By 1952, it had a membership of 5,000 and 200 local groups. In 1953, its membership had risen to 7-8,000, with over 350 local groups. The assembly organised International Women's Day celebrations, campaigns against the Korean war and German rearmament, against rising prices and, according to Tricia Davis, for 'painless childbirth techniques as practised in the Soviet Union'. (Davis, 1982:97). Dorothy Thompson recalled how they had a very lively local group in Halifax where she was living.

> "It met for several years. It was mainly CP women, the wives of CP men, who weren't themselves in the party, and quite a lot of people who had never been in any political body, including some of the wives of these Korean servicemen. And we had regular meetings and theatre outings, parties and lots of children's activity. (Dorothy Thomson, interview).

Whilst the National Assembly of Women was in Dorothy Thompson's judgement, a primarily social organisation, the attempt to foster female support

1. From an interview with Dorothy Thompson, one of the women who was involved in starting the National Assembly of Women.

for communism did result in the 'domestic' being made political to a limited degree. But the issues it raised were never taken properly on board by the CP. Particular women expressed dissatisfaction with the way that the party was organised: with the sexual division of labour in party work; and with the way that women were being defined, more and more, as 'dyed-in-the-wool housewives'. But the CP was not ready to change. Instead, it too conformed to the 1950s ideology of women as mothers first and workers second, and sought to politicise mothers not by bringing them into the labour force, but by involving them in the campaign for peace. By 1954, according to Tricia Davis, even the National Assembly of Women had become almost exclusively concerned with 'peace'.

## Pacificism in the Cold War

In a climate where pacifists were charged with aiding communism, where the pacificist National Peace Council[1] was 'confused' with the British Peace Committee, pacificists still maintained some contact with CP members in the early years of the Korean war. Peace, pacifists believed, had never been the product of war; indeed, the treaties of one war had provided the basis for the next. The new atomic arms race, far from forcing co-existence between nations, was merely the latest expression of this fated policy in their eyes. Pacifists looked instead to understanding and tolerance as the foundation of world peace. When war broke out in Korea they tried to foster this in their campaign: writing to Government leaders; holding meetings for conscientious objectors; forming

1. The National Peace Council was set up in 1908 to co-ordinate existing peace societies and other societies interested in peace. It had a broad political base, taking care to invite people with differing political views to its meetings. Many notable figures have been involved over the years, including Philip Noel-Baker, Dr Alex Wood, Herbert Morrison, Victor Gollancz, Konni Zilliacus, Ian Mikardo, Harold Wilson. See Ingram (1959).

a 'Peace with China' council when the war threatened to escalate there. They did not reject the communist case or the communist campaign out of hand, but, as anti-communist propaganda became more virulent, tolerance became a liability, and the National Peace Council barred any formal links with the British Peace Committee.[1]

In the early 1950s, pacificists were alone in campaigning for a non-aligned and disarmed Britain. In the face of enormous pressure to conform to an aggresive defence policy, pacificists claimed the freedom to think and to campaign quite outside the logic of military security that dominated political thinking in the cold war. They proposed, in its stead, a moral politics in which the creation of a peaceful, democratic and caring world would be achieved by peaceful means. Rejecting any government policy that was based on the threatened or actual use of arms, they drew on Ghandi's teachings in developing a non-violent defence policy for a neutral Britain. Whilst they saw total and world-wide disarmament as the only really effective way to halt nuclear proliferation, they argued that Britain, by disarming itself of conventional weapons and not developing its own nuclear weapons, could have a profound effect on the hold of the arms race on other nations. In the shorter term, a neutral Britain could find a place within a 'third camp' of neutral nations, freed morally and politically from the military blocs of East and West.

In the early 1950s, pacifists inconspicuously focused on the very concerns and pioneered many of the activities that were to inspire so large a movement later in the decade. Peace News, the main pacifist paper, drew attention to the harmful effects of atomic testing, especially after the

1. Ingram (1959) describes how the National Peace Council took legal action when it was suggested that it was a communist organisation. After this they decided to refuse applications for affiliation from any body affiliated to the British Peace Committee.

British programme was announced in February, 1952; it made public the inevitable inadequacy of civil defence; it looked to a peaceful decolonisation policy for the colonised world. There were a few attempts at non-violent action; a squat outside the Ministry of Defence in Whitehall; a march to Aldermaston in 1952 and 1953 and a picket at the atomic plant there; a demonstration at Britain's germ warfare factory at Porton.

Women played quite a prominent part in these early groups and were frequent contributors to Peace News. These women asked what they, as women, had at stake in war and in peace. Some claimed that women had a 'special relationship to peace' based on their greater sensitivity to the human cost of war and their 'spirit of gentleness and reconciliation' that could be lent to preserving the peace. These arguments were linked, by Vera Brittain and others, to the achievement of female - or perhaps more accurately feminine - emancipation. They believed that this could come not through participation in war and violence, but through opposition to it.

By December 1951, the communist and pacifist campaigns were beginning to bear some fruit. A soviet disarmament proposal, calling for a complete and internationally supervised system of controls to lay the ground for the abolition of atomic weapons, was finally taken up in the United Nations. Although the popular appeal of this proposal was said to be so wide as to force Western powers 'onto the defensive', [1] these talks, and many others over the years to come, were to achieve very little. Governments in both East and West were set, for the indefinite future, on the path of directing massive resources to the production of ever deadlier weapons of mass destruction, and of legitimating, through a whole range of measures, the pursuit of 'defence' through nuclear might.

1. The Times, quoted in WN and V. (19.1.52).

# CHAPTER 3

## 'EQUALITY IN DIFFERENCE'. LABOUR OUT OF OFFICE

At the end of Labour's term in office in October, 1951, its record and its future fell due for much needed re-examination. The central question, of how far this Government had effected an 'installment of socialism'[1] met with very differing responses from the left and right of the party. G.D.H.Cole addressed this question with ever greater concern now that Labour had fallen from office. His analysis of the shortcomings of the Labour Government, whilst placing much responsibility on the leadership, extended to the whole of the party. Cole argued that the Labour Government, in allowing socialism 'to recede into the future as an Ideal', had lost both purpose and vision. Postponing its socialist aims 'for the struggle against Communism and for the maintenance and further development of the Welfare state', (Cole, 1952b:28) it had also failed to revise and develop them. The party was, in effect, colluding in the dissolution of Western socialism. For without a vision of a socialist future, the welfare state and the mixed economy were becoming the only features of Labour's programme.

This weakening of socialism was not restricted to the Labour Party. The whole labour movement, Cole claimed, (1952a) was exhausted and dispirited, making more urgent his call on the party to resume a genuine democratic socialist lead. He argued too that the Labour Party had to adopt a principled programme to regain popularity. Disillusioned with Labour's record, and apathetic in the face of the cold war, the electorate had to be inspired to give Labour its support.

G.D.H.Cole did not make light of the difficulties of sustaining idealism in a tense and divided world; he merely focused on the imperative need to try. He realised too that 'being in pacts with the USA' (Cole, 1952a:19) did much to harm Labour's socialism. As the Labour Party, moving closer to American foreign policy, took the step of supporting the intervention of the American military in South Korea, Cole was moved to protest. He

1. Cole (1952b).

resigned from his position as chairman of the Fabian society.[1]

Whatever the earlier idealism of the Labour Party leadership, Cole was right to argue that it had been lost in its struggle to meet the perceived needs of the present. What was more, Labour's limited view of the possible in times of stringency did not change as conditions improved. Instead, the desirable and the possible had come to be one and the same in a party that espoused limited reformism and nothing more. Cole's sense of lonely despair could only have been worsened by Labour's failure to regenerate any socialist ideals. There was very little socialist writing in the early 1950s, the cold war's most icy years.

The Labour Party had not been oblivious to the problem of retaining popular support, particularly before the elections in 1950 and 1951. However the right and left in the party had come to see this problem - and indeed the interests of the working class - in very different terms. For the party's right-wing, electoral success (and indeed 'democracy') lay in tailoring policies in line with an assessment of what they believed the 'electorate' wanted. However by 1950, faced with what was generally termed "working class apathy", Labour's executive sought electoral victory not by inspiring anew the support of the working class for socialism, but by attempting to retain working class support, and win middle class support, with the promise of consolidation - and affluence.

The 'Bevanite' challenge to the Labour Party right (and, ipso facto , the Labour leadership) began, as we have seen as a protest against the domestic implications of high defence spending. Once they had formed as a group in Parliament, these left-wing MP's made a sustained attempt to actually radicalise party policy. Perhaps predictably, nationalisation and rearmament

1. Crossman (1970:v).

were the key issues on which they attempted to influence the executive.

At the party's annual conference in 1952, a resolution was successfully passed that called on a reluctant executive to draw up a list of suitable industries for nationalisation; and from then till June 1953, the central debate within the Labour Party focused on just which industries these should be.[1] The Bevanites were successful too in winning two constituency seats on the national executive committee. R.Crossman and H.Wilson replaced the stalwarts Herbert Morrison and Hugh Dalton. This success for the left inspired retaliatory action by non-Bevanites in the Parliamentary Labour Party, who passed a resolution banning all 'unofficial' groups. However the influence of Bevanism did not end with its formal organisation in Parliament. Its representation on the executive, and its growing popularity in the constituencies, did ensure that the left had some influence on party policy. Challenge to Britain, published by the Labour Party executive in June 1953, whilst proposing that only iron and steel, road haulage, water and sugar be nationalised, did suggest a long list of concerns for what was termed 'partial nationalisation'. (It promised to remove health service charges too). The left, at annual conference that year, pressed for these industries to be nationalised outright, but without success. There was, in fact, too little trade union support for further nationalisation.

The Rearmament Dilemma.

Whilst the ceasefire in Korea in June 1953 had lessened fears of war, the weapons drive continued unabated. In August Malenkov , the Soviet Union's new Premier, claimed that the USA was no longer the only 'H bomb power'.[2]

1. See Haseler (1969) for a particularly good account of the struggle between the Bevanites and the Gaitskellites in this period, and for an analysis of the rise of revisionism.

2. See WN and V (22.8.53) and Divine (1978:17).

This apparent achievement of parity did not, as some had hoped, bring a change in international defence policy. All sides held to the right of 'first use', with Britain supporting the Pentagon in its policy of threatening massive nuclear retaliation even against a non-nuclear attack.

It was the continuing American pursuit of its H bomb programme that was to inspire a broadly-based disarmament campaign. On March 1st 1954 the American military exploded an H bomb in the Pacific, obliterating the island of Bikini and releasing radioactivity into the atmosphere that could be detected as far away as Japan. The belated evacuation of the nearby islanders did not pass unnoticed, but the US Government was having some success in placating the American public when the Japanese, shocked by the medical condition of the crew of the 'Lucky Dragon' fishing boat who had been fishing outside the prohibited area at the time of the explosion, came out in protest against the very real damage that this explosion had done.[1] This forced the American Government and the Atomic Energy Commission to answer more searching questions about the dangers of testing and the power of the H bomb. Lewis Strauss, called on by the Government to speak for the Atomic Energy Commission , underplayed the implications of this explosion vis-a-vis the competence of American scientists, (there were grounds for believing that the explosion had been out of control), and the lasting health of living things. However, to the incredulity of the attending press, he was unambiguous in his pronouncement that a single H bomb could 'take out' the metropolitan area of New York.[2]

1. See Divine (1978:4-7; 29).

A qualitative change had occurred in the nature of arms; technology no longer set any limits on the destructiveness of weapons. Now it rested with those who controlled weapons use and manufacture to decide whether, (an even how many times over), they would prepare to destroy the world, and under what conditions they would countenance such an act. Many voices urged them to show restraint, and some called on them to refuse this awesome choice and not rearm.

Whilst the enormity of Lewis Strauss' revelation detracted from any American campaign against nuclear weapons testing, a more sustained outcry could be heard elsewhere. Jawaharlal Nehru, the Indian Prime Minister, protested on behalf of all the peoples of Asia who were repeatedly made to suffer at the hands of others. In Britain, both civil defence programmes and nuclear weapons policy where more actively opposed. Coventry Councy Council voted to scrap its civil defence programme, since the H bomb had made it a 'waste of time and money'. (PN, 23.4.54). And, shocked by the incredible destructiveness that this test had so graphically illustrated, people whose concerns ranged from nuclear arms limitation to total disarmament came together to organise a petition against the eventuality that they all abhored - the use of the H bomb. Their petition actually asked for less than this. Pacificists were still more or less alone in calling for unilateral action, and it was multilateralists who took the lead.[1] Although the petition was not as successful as the organisers had hoped, in a year they had collected half a million signatures. And although this breach between 'unilateralists' (who believed that Britain should disarm alone, and work for international disarmament), and 'multilateralists' (who believed that Britain should work for international disarmament, and not act alone) remained a very significant one, some

1. See Morrison (1962) for an account of the differences between the Labour supporters and the pacifists.

individuals (such as Fenner Brockway, M.P., Rev. Donald Soper, Canon John Collins) worked together on the petition, and went on to set up with others the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, (the CND).

The Communist Party was rather taken aback by the extent of concern over this test. The notion that 'peace' was indeed the best campaign for achieving unity with other groups was revived, with some success. In the summer of 1954, labour and communist club members 'and many others' at Oxford university came together to publicise the dangers of nuclear arms and to organise another petition, opposing in advance the manufacture of a British H bomb. Charles Taylor, the 'chairman' of the campaign, made a case against the H bomb that was to be so loudly echoed a few years later. He argued that it was a weapon so destructive as to be 'different in kind' from any that had come before; so different that it had made 'just war' an impossibility, and him a pacifist (Taylor, 1954). The time had come, even for Oxford intellectuals, to be politically involved.

Although this particular campaign did not outlive the summer, it did bring together several individuals - Raphael Samuel, Charles Taylor, Gabriel Pearson - who, three years later, published the Universities and Left Review, and who organised the publicity for the first large Aldermaston March.

The failure of the Berlin talks to secure German unification hastened Western negotiations to secure German rearmament. These were hampered by French opposition, and over the next few months communists and labour dissidents were to step up their campaign of opposition. Both saw the rearming of Western Germany as central to the American's dangerous drive for military supremacy, and both feared that a revived German army would eschew Western control and pursue nationalist ends of its own. As the right claimed that the growth of German democracy was dependent on German

arms, the left pointed out that it was the Social Democratic Party that opposed rearmament, for they also feared that Nazi-ism could rise again. To no avail. October 1954 saw the signing of an agreement for German rearmament, and the passing of a pro-rearmament resolution at the Labour Party conference. Whilst the campaign of opposition lived on until this agreement was ratified by the Governments of other N.A.T.O member states, only six Labour MP's went against the instruction to abstain and registered a vote against. And as if to emphasise the connection between German rearmament and the nuclear arms race that the left had emphasised in this campaign, the Government, in February 1955, announced that Britain was to manufacture its own hydrogen bomb.

The Labour leadership, despite initial disagreements, voted for a British H bomb. Indeed, they echoed the Prime Minister in their description of the bomb as a weapon of deterrence and not of aggression. All agreed that its very destructiveness made its use unthinkable, and Attlee went so far as to claim that the bomb would compel peaceful co-existence between nations. But opinion is a far cry from policy, and when Bevan pressed Attlee on the question of whether he would use nuclear weapons to counter a non-nuclear attack, Attlee did not say that he would not. This, and not the manufacture of a British H bomb became the focal point of difference in the Labour Party. In all, 62 Labour MP's abstained from voting for Labour's official amendment to Conservative defence policy, and whilst some did oppose the manufacture of a British H bomb, many were following Bevan in sanctioning its manufacture but renouncing 'first use'.[1]

The ire of months of disagreement over the details of defence policy brought Bevan's expulsion from the Parliamentary Labour Party. The disunity that this engendered tended to obscure the extent of common ground

1. Peace News gave much coverage to this debate, and the whole issue of nuclear weapons. Much of the material I use is drawn from Peace News.

between the 'Bevanites' and the leadership, such as their belief in negotiated multilateralism. Any moves for Bevan's expulsion from the Labour Party were abandoned not because his views had found more favour in the Parliamentary Labour Party but, given his widespread support in the Constituency Labour Parties and the trade unions, because the party had to be pulled together for the forthcoming general election in May 1955.

## The Rise of Labour Party Revisionism

Consternation with Labour's policies was not shared by some particularly influential thinkers to the right of the party. These thinkers, of whom C.A.R. Crosland, John Strachey and Hugh Gaitskell were the most renowned, produced the theoretical justification for the re-definition of socialism that featured already in official Labour Party programmes.[1] They gave their support to the mixed economy that Labour had brought into being. This, these revisionists believed, had so changed capitalism that socialism had been rendered out of date.

John Strachey was a particularly influential exponent of this view, not least because he had been a marxist and a critic of Keynes in the 1930s.[2] Strachey argued that capitalism, despite his earlier beliefs, had proved susceptible to democratic - i.e. parliamentary pressure, and had been unrecognisably improved. Full (male) employment, high investment, greater equality had all been achieved through the implementation of the Keynesian policies he had previously opposed. Hardship and slump, for Strachey as for the other revisionists, were now things of the past.

1. See Strachey (1951), and the articles by Crosland (1970; 1956) and Gaitskell (1956a; 1956b).

2. See Strachey (1951).

Revisionist ideas were not restricted to a few key Labour Party theorists. Two groups were formed in the party to canvass for revisionism (and Attlee, the party leader, supported both). One of these, the Socialist Union, was linked to Socialist Commentary, a journal that was identified with the right of the party. The other revisionist group grew up in the Fabian society, and was responsible for the widely read New Fabian Essays that were published in 1952.[1] With the shared appreciation of the need to reconsider fabianism and make it appropriate for a world in the shadow of war, these essays sought to understand the new 'political economic and social scene as a basis for reformulating socialist principles'[2] that had been developed in times of peace. These essays did not however encompass the breadth of Fabian thinking (G.D.H.Cole for example, had refused to contribute since all the other writers were in favour of Britain's involvement in the Korean war).

The revisionist approach to 'socialist principles' consisted, typically, of an elaboration of how equal opportunities plus welfare in a mixed economy equalled socialism. They called this 'moral' socialism, a description that they justified with the rhetoric of freedom, equality, and fellowship, and which set them apart from the belief in the need to transform the structure of capitalism, and dispossess the capitalist class.

In the New Fabian Essays, Crosland and Strachey made this case particularly strongly. Crosland, sharing Strachey's view that 'by 1951 Britain had, in all essentials, ceased to be a capitalist country', (Crosland, 1970:42), used the label 'statist' to describe a Britain transformed.

1. See Crossman (1970). Tribune was the paper of the Bevanite left. Tribune however was far stronger on news and information, than on analysis.

2. Cole and Crossman (1970:xiii).

The fundamental change, for Crosland as for Strachey, was the replacement of 'laissez-faire' capitalism by a system of state control. This had reduced the inequalities of opportunity and wealth and, with them, the bitterness that they had engendered. To complete this process of change, inequality and, more centrally, the negative consciousness of class, had to be further reduced. For 'the worker can no longer be said to be exploited' wrote Crosland (1970:60), and psychology, not class struggle, was the key to socialism ahead.

Other writers, such as R.H.S.Crossman, thought that Britain had much further to travel down this 'socialist' road. They agreed though that persuasion not coercion, reform not revolution, state controls not public ownership were the keys to principled advance. They all agreed too that the protection of Britain's 'national self-interest' abroad was compatible with 'peace and progress' there.

The left, whilst it did oppose the drift to revisionism in party policy, held their fire in the run-up to the 1955 General Election. Labour's manifesto, Forward with Labour made no mention of the nationalisation proposals that had been approved by conference. But when Labour lost the election, and when Gaitskell replaced Attlee as party leader, even greater odds were stacked against the left's campaign.[1]

It was the right-wing orientation of the trade union leadership in the 1950s that ultimately thwarted the Bevanites attempt to shift party policy significantly leftwards. Three major unions, the Transport and General Workers, the General and Municipal Workers and the National Union of Mineworkers commanded a large proportion of the vote both on the TUC and the Labour Party conference, and the leaders of these unions were solid in

1. Gaitskell, when chancellor, had imposed the health service charges in 1951. He had come to represent the party's right against the Bevanite left. He had strong trade union support. See Haseler (1969:39).

their support for the leaders of the party.[1] When the Bevanites first emerged as a parliamentary force, these trade union leaders made an informal alliance with the right of the Labour Party and determined to defeat them. And whilst there were some unions (particularly those that were communist influenced) that did vote against the Labour leadership on occasion, they were neither a unified nor necessarily a pro-Bevanite force.

Following Gaitskell's election, the left in effect lost its leader. Bevan became reconciled to Gaitskell surprisingly quickly, and rose in office, but at the price, in his supporters eyes, of betrayal. Bevan's ascendence in the Parliamentary Labour Party led to his appointment, by Gaitskell, as 'Shadow' Foreign Secretary, from which position he made his anti-unilateralism speech at the 1957 Labour Party conference. And whilst Bevan, despite his change in position, did still differ significantly from many in the Labour Party leadership on defence and other issues, these differences, to quote Ralph Miliband,

> "... were entirely overshadowed by Bevan's support for the Executive and for the Leader of the Party. With his speech at the 1957 Conference, Bevan unambiguously removed himself from the leadership of the Labour Left and appeared to accept as final his position as Hugh Gaitskell's second in command. And with the massive endorsement by the 1957 Conference of'Industry and Society', and the equally massive rejection of unilateralism, the Right seemed more firmly entrenched than ever, with a Leader of its own persuasion in unchallenged command of the Labour Party."(Miliband, 1972:337).

Industry and Society, the document that the 1957 Conference so massively endorsed, represented the executive's - and particularly Gaitskell's - views on the future of public ownership. It was a revisionist document. The Labour Party was presented here as the party of the 'mixed economy' - a socialised economy had ceased to be its goal. The state, under Labour, would only intervene in the economy as disciplinarian, reserving

1. See Haseler (1969:28-34) and Howell (nd:22-35).

> "the right to extend public ownership in any industry or part of industry which, after thorough enquiry, is found to be seriously failing the nation."(Labour Party, 1957:57).

and as investor, acquiring shares in private concerns.

Since the publication of the New Fabian Essays in 1952, revisionists in the party had been arguing with increasing force that further state ownership was not only unnecessary but misconceived. The publication, in 1956, of Crosland's The Future of Socialism and John Strachey's Contemporary Capitalism did much to inform this position, marking, in Stephen Haseler's works, 'the final break, in intellectual terms, with the Marxist legacy within Socialist thinking'. (Haseler, 1969:82).

Central to the thought of both these writers was the view, already postulated in the New Fabian Essays that ownership had been effectively separated from control. The growth of state power and rise of the managerial class had both conspired to remove the old-style capitalists from decision-making - and the system had become less exploitative as a result. One very significant change was that the profit motive had ceased to be the sole motivator for private enterprise; managers had a broader, and in many ways more enlightened view of the parameters of business success. To upset these trends by the extension of the state sector was seen as a dangerous irrelevance, since it would in all likelihood replace the rational, efficient and decentralised control of the managers by the bureaucratic, inefficient and centralised control of the state.

Crosland's 'redefinition' of socialism was not limited to opposing the further transfer of capital; he was also opposed to the further devolution of power. He had arrived at the view that workers' democracy was an impossible goal in the large corporate enterprises that were increasingly replacing the smaller concerns. Workers would always and inevitably be

alienated, he argued, and managers in control.

Revisionism was not without its measure of idealism all the same. Its rhetoric was the the rhetoric of freedom, equality, social justice and a 'classless society' and it looked to the extension of welfare. But this idealism was not consistently translated into policy, particularly since the pursuit of affluence was often placed before all other concerns. And the personal and political freedom that revisionists held to be the most important ideal of all could only ever be the freedom of the working class as consumers but not as workers, as voters for others and not as controllers for themselves.

Revisionism did not become the official party philosophy unopposed. At the 1957 Conference, speakers from the left and indeed from the trade unions spoke against the proposals in Industry and Society, and a resolution was moved (and defeated) calling on the executive to affirm its belief in common ownership.[1] Nor did the debate die there, as the furore over Clause 4 in 1960 was to show. In 1957, the acquiescence of dissenters was temporarily secured by the old promise of parliamentary power. The majority in the Labour Party believed that the Conservative party had been so thoroughly discredited by the Suez crisis that Labour would win the next election, with the proviso that the party presented a united front. But as we shall see, the growth in the controversy over nuclear weapons, and the efforts of members of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament to win the Labour Party for unilateralism meant that Labour went into the 1960 election with little more than a facade of unity. Labour was badly defeated, and only then did dissenters in the party succeed in challenging the leadership's control. At the 1960 Labour Party Conference,

1. See Miliband (1972:334).

the attempt by the executive to remove the socialist Clause 4 from the party's constitution (the clause that committed the party to common ownership) was defeated, and a unilateralist motion approved, over the head of an angry and, in the latter case, intransigent Gaitskell. Gaitskell decided to let the symbolic Clause 4 remain. Not so with unilateralism. As much as 4 years before the next election, the call for unity could still ensure that the leadership's will prevail.

## The Politics of the Family in the 1950s

The family was one institution that no group, left or right, seriously questioned. Indeed, it was seen as the central institution of a good society, and, by some, as the model for society as a whole.[1] As the Labour leadership abandoned socialist politics, 'strengthening' the family became the stated aim of very many of the policies it espoused.

By the early 1950s, the benefits of the new welfare state were beginning to show. B.Seebohm Rowntree and G.R.Lavers, in a follow up to their 1936 study of working class families in York, found that in 1951 only 2.77% of the working class, as compared with 31.1% in 1946, were living below a (stringent) poverty line.[2] But whilst this reduction in the extent of primary poverty was the result, in part, of the introduction of welfare measures - of food subsidies, family allowances, of better housing and new National Health Service, of state benefits in sickness, unemployment and old age - the key factor was not welfare but employment. The virtual

1. As Elizabeth Wilson argues (1980), sociologists played a key role in this. They morally approved of the family, and embarked on empirical studies to legitimate their view. Many disturbing aspects of family living were consequently hidden from view. Several new left supporters I interviewed commented that the involvement of sociologists in the early new left was one possible reason for its blindness on the family, and women's role within it.

2. See Rowntree and Lavers (1951).

elimination of male unemployment and the growth of female employment kept most families out of poverty; it was the old and the sick who were found most frequently in the poorest groups. Often too, female employment was the all important factor in keeping a working class family above the poverty line - a fact that did not receive the attention it deserved.

Whilst the introduction of the welfare state represented an undeniable advance in social policy, its conception and its shortcomings show both how dominant was the view of the family as an economic unit with a male head and breadwinner, and how unquestioned and indeed how unacknowledged, was the role of female as domestic worker/home maker and economic support. Better welfare provisions, in alleviating family poverty, would undoubtedly have made women's domestic responsibilities easier to bear; only provisions to relieve them of some of the actual responsibilities would have given them the freedom to pursue more independent lives. But these changes were not forthcoming. The trend that Labour had begun, of celebrating the family's naturalness and morality was a convenient mask for the limitations of welfare policy and for the continuing inequality between men and women, both within and outside the household. While the <u>conditions</u> of family living were improved, the sexual division of labour remained unchanged. The domestic barriers that stood in the way of women's advancement at work were left standing. Equal rights legislation was never passed.

The dominant view - that women were mothers first and workers second - marginalised the needs, and indeed the rights, of all working women. Even though the numbers of women in employment rose steadily through the 1950s, it was accompanied neither by more state childcare, nor by better opportunities, nor indeed by a change in women's unequal rates of pay.

Much of this increase in women's employment was a result of women with schoolage children finding employment in the 'female industries', often on a part-time basis. The notion of women as essentially 'mothers' had an effect over the whole of their adult lives, legitimating their burdens in the home and their subordination at work, whether they had dependent children or not.

Despite domestic obstacles and discrimination, many mothers with young children did have paid jobs, and some researchers did investigate their needs.[1] The International Labour Review published the results of several social surveys, including a study in 1950 of these mothers' childcare arrangements.[2] Not surprisingly, they found that there was a great deal of unsatisfied demand for nursery care from working mothers.

Their conclusion fell on deaf ears. The plight of working mothers remained outside the realm of 'politics', receiving only tangential attention in the consideration of child welfare and juvenile crime. And policy makers were less than willing to increase the responsibility of the state in even those areas. 'Bad mothering', and not inadequate provision, was the 'official' source of any problems in children's welfare and behaviour, and it was with (perhaps better educated) mothers that the official solution lay. At a time when women's sole claim to social status was as mothers, it was only their needs, as mothers, that commanded any attention at all. And then, the old identification of mothers' needs with children's needs, meant that women's experience was hidden, and women's rights ignored.

1. The proportion of married women in employment rose steadily through the late 1940s and 1950s. Whilst in 1947, only 18% of all married women living with their husbands were in gainful employment, by 1951, 25% of married women were employed outside the home. By 1961, this had risen to one third. From Myrdal and Klein, (1968:51-72).

2. From International Labour Review (1950. LXII (5) ). See also International Labour Review (1951. LXIII (3:6), for example.

The more enlightened view of women's position in the 1950s was that women were equal but different. It was expressed by feminists and non-feminists alike. Lord Justice Denning, speaking to the Marriage Guidance Council (Denning 1950) expressed this view particularly well. He described how women's 'principle task' was 'to bear and rear children' (Denning 1950:1) in the matrimonial home. A woman may be weaker, less aggressive, take fewer initiatives than her husband, he claimed, but emotionally, intellectually, socially, she was his equal. Marriage was a partnership of mutual dependence, where the woman's work in the family was as important as the man's outside it. This was an attitude that most feminists shared. Concerned, as we have seen, to stress the social importance of mothering and to press for the greater recognition and indeed the broader application of women's nurturing skills, feminists in the 1950s did not seek to transform women's familial roles. For the more traditionally minded, all that was sought was a more positive evaluation of the contribution that women currently made - that women, for their work in the family, be praised. Other feminists, recognising the difficulties that women faced in trying to combine their (albeit primary) responsibilities in the home with any activity outside it, did press for some piecemeal change. However, the main focus of this debate on women was on 'social attitudes' more than material constraints; a focus in which the value of feminity became a central concern. Feminist women, believing that it was through feminine qualities that women's 'special contribution' to society was made, went so far as to identify feminism with femininity. This depiction of 'feminism as femininity' in the 1950s was very popular amongst women writers, but it is worth noting that it had not gained popularity in the absence of an alternative view.[1]

1. See Birmingham Feminist History Group (1970:48) for a very good analysis of feminism in the 1950s.

Simone de Beauvoir's epic work, The Second Sex, was first published in Britain, in translation, in 1953. Widely read (and, it would appear, rapidly forgotten), it was only ten years later that de Beauvoir's ideas informed a new, more radical feminism.[1] De Beauvoir presented her reader with an uncompromising analysis of male dominance. The holders of power and the makers of history, men, she argued, had defined and oppressed women. 'This has always been a man's world' she wrote (de Beauvoir, 1972:93) and woman, 'man's dependent,if not his slave' has only been defined in relation to him. Central to de Beauvoir's analysis was her concept of the 'other'. A fundamental category in human thought, the juxtaposition of 'subject' and 'other' was presented by de Beauvoir as an original human orientation to the world that entailed the aspiration to belittle and dominate; an orientation that, through the whole of history, has rested in man's control.

De Beauvoir drew on both historical and philosophical material, to give a detailed account of what woman's 'otherness' has and does entail. Taking issue with the male depiction of the female, she rested her argument not with man's denigration of women, but with his denial of her human potential. Afforded less opportunities, and constrained within a peculiarly static and pervasive mythology, women, she maintained, actually were inferior. Frivolous, infantile and irresponsible, their orientation was to the trivial and the everyday. And the notion that women have a special importance as spiritual beings was, she claimed, nothing more than a mystification of women's nothingness, giving their lives an erroneous meaning beyond this world since they were denied meaning within it.

1. The Second Sex appeared in fourteen reprintings in paperback between 1961 and 1962.

Simone de Beauvoir went on to argue that this 'myth of womanhood', created by men for the oppression of women, had been particularly advantageous for the 'ruling caste' throughout history. '... it justifies all privileges and even authorises their abuse' (ibid:285) and women, trapped by biology, ideology and structure, would have to act collectively if they are to become free. For when individual women break this stereotype, they were judged, not as having achieved human status, but with jettisoning their feminity - with throwing away all that was rightfully theirs.

Simone de Beauvoir was well aware of the difficulties of women acting collectively. Living separate lives, and attached to individual men, women lacked both the strength and the commitment to change. This lack may not be overcome, even in times of revolutionary change. Looking to the French Revolution, she argued that

> "It was a tradition of resignation and submission, a lack of solidarity and collective consciousness, that left them thus disarmed before the new opportunities that were opening up before them."(de Beauvoir, 1972:146).

And whilst she saw a socialist revolution as making women's emancipation possible, she recognised that the problems this poses are far from solved.

In the belief that women in the USSR were, at least, on the right road, she looked to a future where women, freed from slavery in reproduction and from oppression by men, would be able both to share in productive labour and to reproduce; to a society where, in ways yet to be devised, reproduction and production would be integrated and not separate, and where all individuals would be able to achive a 'truly human status', by right.

The majority of British feminists did not share in Simone de Beauvoir's depiction of the feminine as negative and of women as inferior. Whilst

there was some critical recognition of the constraints that were placed on women's lives, the emphasis in the 1950s was less on opening up greater opportunities for women than on generating a shift in attitudes towards them. Central was their belief that women, as mothers, made an indispensable contribution to society already, and should be recognised for what they did.

Within this overall concensus, there were differences nonetheless. Alva Myrdal and Viola Klein in their study Women's Two Roles. Home and Work,[1] opposed the restrictions that women workers faced. Tracing the different phases in 'the female life span', they showed how the pressures of women's domestic lives had undermined their ability to make advances in employment. Myrdal and Klein, in common with other feminist researchers of their time, did not take issue with women's special responsibility as childrearers through the early years of infancy, and celebrated the 'creative contribution' that mothers made. But they did take issue with motherhood's long term and negative effects. They called for legislation to improve the conditions of women's employment, and for a change in the restrictive and outdated ideology that woman's place was in the home. They proposed in its stead a new ideal of the married working woman, an ideal, they argued that would recognise the special value of integrating home and work.

A Report of a Conference on the Feminist Point of View[2] was an interesting example of a particularly radical orientation to women and politics. The result of four years discussion by a group of feminists, this report had grown out of their despair at the pattern of history, with the cyclical resort to 'rivalry, aggression, tyranny, brutality, mass murder' (Campbell, 1952:13) - to war. Passing judgement on the male leadership and the

1. Myrdal and Klein (1968). This was first published in 1956.
2. Campbell (1952).

'militaristic' culture that had brought such horrors to pass, these feminists looked to women to build a different, peaceful future. They believed this to entail the adoption, by society, of a 'feminine point of view', a point of view that, derided or ignored by society to date, had failed to make the impact that was so desparately needed and so thoroughly deserved.

In analysing the positive virtues of the 'feminine point of view', these feminists asked why women had not had political influence. Their discussion threw interesting light on the problems that confront women's politics. For the feminine qualities that pertained, in their eyes, to motherhood, and that women should take into social and political life, were qualities of compassion, sympathy, non-violence and selflessness - qualities that have all too often denied women autonomy, and have resulted in women's capitulation in the face of male power.

As distinct from 'radical feminists',[1] the supporters of a more traditional femininity[2] believed that equality had, in essence, already been achieved. Firmly committed to the 'equal but different' view, these feminists campaigned to enhance women's status, to lessen women's burdens, but not to transform women's role. With a model of the best women as middle class, intelligent, feminine and domestically skilled, they envisaged a society in which women, encouraged by their greater social status, would involve themselves in their primarily domestic lives with greater enthusiasm and

1. Other writers here included Viola Klein (1946); Gergrude Williams (1945) and Charlotte Leutkins (1946). Although they did not think that women had achieved equality, they did not look to an autonomous women's movemement to achieve change. They were careful too to emphasise that men and women would be co-partners in the more feminised society of the future.

2. One writer here was Judith Hubback who published the revealingly titled Wives Who Went to College in 1957. She considered herself to be a 'reasonable modern feminist' since her feminism, she claimed, built on the diversity of the sexes. Elisabeth Wilson discusses 'reasonable' feminism in (1980:162-185).

more loving care. (Even in the early 1950s, this could not have been an easy task. A Gallup Poll quoted in the Campbell study had found that 37% of adult women would rather have been born men). Their emphasis on the primacy of marriage and children in women's lives, and their failure to question whether every woman did want to be a mother, amounted to little more than a celebration of an ill-informed picture of the status quo. Perhaps they, too, had been influenced by the view that 'women and the family' are not 'real' political concerns.

# CHAPTER 4

Alas, we
Who wished to lay the foundations of kindness
Could not ourselves be kind.

But you, when at last it comes to pass
That man can help his fellow man,
Do not judge us
Too harshly.

From To Posterity, Bertolt Brecht, (1947).[1]

So sharp was the division between East and West in the late 1940s and early 1950s that it was enormously difficult to be politically active and non-aligned. Socialists who attempted to be critical of both power blocs were marginalised, and misrepresented. We have seen the uncertainty, even the despair of socialists in the Labour Party as their party drew closer to the USA. Now, we will look at the experience of socialists who, through membership of the Communist Party, were lined up on 'the enemy's'side.

The experience of being a communist must bear some relation to the reasons that inspired membership of the party: to the Spanish civil war and the popular front in the 1930s; to the fight against fascism and the cause of the partisans in the Second World War; to the defence of the USSR in the early 1950s; and to the fight against the changing forms of capitalist oppression through all these years. These divergent causes continued to inform the politics of different generations of members, even if they were long since passed: they coloured the experience of communism in the cold war.

1. Reprinted in the Reasoner 2, Sept. 1956.

At the level of theory, different generations of Communist Party members were united by a belief in historical progress that gave meaning to their struggles against capitalism, past and present. The belief that history was on their side also made it easier for CP members to withstand attacks against them - and, as we shall see, to deflect the charges of extensive injustice and repression in the USSR and Eastern Europe. They shared too a common reference point in the Labour Government's 'betrayal' of '1945' when, it was maintained, the potential for far-reaching socialist change, and for long-lasting Soviet friendship, had been undermined by the non-socialism, and the anti-Sovietism, of the Labour leaders.

Communist politics were further legitimised by the very strength and pervasiveness of capitalism and capitalist ideology.

> "The effort to conceal the dictatorship of monopoly capital in our nominally democratic society characterises all our major organs for the formation of public opinion,"

wrote Prof. B. Farrington (1950). 'Truth', never a recognised feature of the bourgeois press, was claimed as the perogative of the CP, implying that communists were both more aware of social realities, and more able to analyse them.

In the divisive cold war years, communism's claim for truth fuelled a 'siege mentality' that resulted in the hardening of communist politics. Marxist 'science', as defined by the party leadership, became the only means by which the world could be understood, and political campaigns, orchestrated by the party hierarchy, the only way it could be changed. This is not to deny the existence of a degree of local autonomy and intellectual freedom within the CP. These however were often maintained despite the party leadership's centrist rule. And they never, even in 1956, succeeded in seriously threatening the leadership's power.

The suspicion and paranoia that surrounded the CP could not but have affected the politics of party members. Doris Lessing, in The Golden Notebook, (1973) writes of the felt need to protect a party 'that people throw stones at'; a need that, in practice, resulted in an overly defensive attitude towards the policies of 'The Party'. Doubts and discords with communist politics in Britain, the USSR and Eastern Europe were, in large part, not articulated by party members to themselves or to others: the CP's embattled position produced an extremely disciplined and unified party. And when they were articulated, party members were effectively silenced by the over-riding need to protect the endangered but epoch making USSR, since any criticism of the USSR could only help 'the other side'.

Defensiveness within the party had a limiting effect on all areas of party work. In the words of Edward Thompson, writing about the mid 1930s to the late 1940s

> "The political issues of those years were so critical as to make all literary or cultural concerns appear as somehow subordinate. The practical initiatives of the party and of its membership were so ardent, so fraught with significance, and sometimes so heroic... that this imparted a peculiar merit to the Party's leaders and officials: the heroism and significance of the times invested a certain charisma on them." 1

Intellectual work within the CP was subject to the continuing tolerance of the party leadership. Groups within the CP investigated and published work in a whole series of areas, in culture and history in particular, and found that 'some doors did open', providing that they could retain the leadership's respect for their work. The extent that they were successful here depended in large part on the contemporary political relevance of the

1. Thompson, E.P. (1979). The British party did not remain unaffected by the policies being pursued by Zhdanov in the CPSU. A.A. Zhdanov was elected onto the political bureau of the CPSU in 1938. He was 'entrusted with leadership of propaganda and agitational work' (Zhdanov, 1950:7), and he took tight control of the arts, censoring work that did not celebrate the heroism, and the heroic potential of the communist world. See Zhdanov (1950).

work in which they were engaged: a dependence that, whilst it facilitated an examination of Britain's radical tradition, laid it open to partisan interpretation and sectarian use. And whilst this work did, as we shall see, provide some important insights into British culture and history, its terms of reference were at once too large, and too narrow to counter the 'jungle marxism' of the cold war years.

In the popular front period of the mid 1930s and in the war years, an explicitly socialist culture had been a vital aspect of CP life. The artists' international was set up in 1933; the CP's writers' group in 1936, and many artists and writers were recruited into the party. The journals Left Review and Our Time inspired cultural interest and published writers' and artists' work. In its early years, Left Review was both informed and encouraged by the party's 'popular front' line, representing as it did a genuine (though opportunistic) broadening in communist politics and thinking. When the political situation changed however, so too did the permissible scope of culture; both these journals were to cease publication as a result of irresistible political pressure, which, at least in the case of Our Time, came from above.

Left Review was a successful monthly literary magazine that ran from 1934 to 1938. 'Privately run on voluntary labour', it published a mix of creative writing and criticism, from international though mainly British sources. It also attempted to unite left-wing writers and literary figures, ('pens and influence'), with working class journalists and writers, and organise them as a political force. This task was made particularly urgent by the growth of fascism, which was widely seen in left-wing circles as capitalism's last, desperate attempt to survive. Under fascism, the editors claimed, the cultural achievements of the past, and the limited freedoms of the present would be tragically lost, and culture would be forced to die. In the face of this real and imminent

danger, Left Review was centrally concerned to foster a revolutionary culture that would at once resist fascism and help build socialism since, between fascism and socialism, there could be no 'middle way'.

Left Review was the work of a group of young communist intellectuals, many of whom went on to be important political writers in the 1940s and 1950s. These intellectuals hoped to win support for a British section of the writers' international. They printed a draft statement of aims for comment in their first issue, and writers' international meetings were fully reported. They also participated in left book club rallies and held conferences of their own, supported the Unity theatre in Merseyside and had their own banners at political demonstrations.

As fascism became more powerful, Left Review became more explicitly political in content. It included analyses of political changes, and blueprints for political advance. The editors' were trying here to mobilise

> "on the cultural front ... a people's movement to oust the National Government and call a check to the advance of Fascist barbarity." (Left Review, 1938, May:958)

In 1937, the war against fascism in Spain became the cause célèbre of Left Review. The focus of the battle between fascism and socialism, it was also seen as the testing ground of the intellectuals' special responsibility to take part in the struggle for socialism with all means he or she could. Many intellectuals, including Ralph Fox and Tom Wintringham did go and fight in Spain, and some, including Ralph Fox and John Cornford, were killed. For Left Review the Spanish Civil War represented, albeit tragically, the realisation of a central part of their goal - the unity of intellectuals and the working class. In the February issue in 1937, Lorca, Cornford and Fox, by giving their lives in Spain, were praised for having

> "re-established with their blood that unity between the creators of beauty and the masses of the people, for the lack of which culture had become a petty play-word in the mouths of an isolated sect." (Left Review, 1937, May:65).

As the danger of a European war increased, Left Review became more explicitly partisan. In the draft statement of the British section of the writers' international in 1934, the executive committee had considered a writer's willingness to come to the defence of the USSR to be evidence of his or her socialist commitment. Now, Left Review called for a left that was united in giving total support to the USSR. (Since it was the only 'truly democratic' country in the world, the USSR was more than worthy of this).

Through 1938, Left Review, whilst still warning of the danger of the fascist threat to culture, and still reiterating the importance of culture as an agent for socialist change, printed less and less creative writing. Its place was taken by political commentary on the growing danger of war and the ever more urgent need for a united 'people's front'. The last issue came out in May 1938. By now, the threat to civilisation called for action, not words. To quote from the last editorial,

> "It is no longer a question of mobilising a group of writers to establish their common aim, nor of tapping a source of writing which previously had found no means of expression. That job has been done so well in the past that it has become now a question of mobilising all writers and artists to defend the very conditions of their work 'in active participation in the great issues of the day'." (Left Review, 1983, May:960).

The editors were resigning in order to devote all their energies to just that. A new journal, Our Time carried on the cultural emphasis of Left Review in the war years, but when this ceased publication in 1946, it was not replaced.

In the late 1940s, the British leadership echoed the 'Zhdanovism' of the CPSU, and no longer encouraged cultural work, or cultural vitality in the

party. But culture had been of too great interest for party members to die down completely in the face of obstruction from above. In the early post-war period, following on the demise of the CP's political appeal, many local branches held open meetings on marxism and culture in the hopes of attracting newcomers to the party. And the writers' group, the artists' group, the architects' group and the literature group, these last two set up under the auspices of the national cultural committee in 1947, all provided important forums for socialists to engage in creative work that, whilst subordinate to the CP's political campaigns, was largely lacking elsewhere.

In 1949, the cultural interests of party members found another forum in Arena, a quarterly literary magazine edited by Randall Swingler, (editor of Left Review and Our Time), Jack Lindsay and John Davenport. Party members from the writers' group (such as Edward Thompson) were closely involved in this. Arena described itself as a magazine of cultural resistance. It set out to rediscover the socialist 'truths' that were being destroyed by capitalist lies. Its search for cultural 'truth' drew on international as well as national sources, and particularly on European writers 'with no iron curtain'. With the worsening relations between East and West that followed on the outbreak of war in Korea, Arena adopted a more explicitly political stance. The magazine, conforming to the national independence campaign that had come to dominate all areas of party work, became primarily concerned with Britain's cultural tradition, and the threat that this was under from American imperialism. In the Sept-Oct issue in 1950, Jack Lindsay and Randall Swingler published vituperous indictments of Western intellectual life. Western intellectuals, they maintained, had stood quietly by whilst warmongering leaders had poisoned 'our' culture and then, when moved to justify their acquiescence, had further damaged the forces for change.

> "Every time an intellectual has attempted to divert the flames of guilt from his shuddering conscience by raising a plaintive bleat that some Soviet writer or musician has been harshly criticised, he is contributing to the propagation of a blight which is infecting

> the roots of our own cultural life; he is covering up and condoning the murder of the human spirit in the West, not simply by ideological filibustering, but by economic sanctions and by judicial force." R.Swingler (1950:63)

The work of evaluating British culture began - and ended - with the romantics, in whom the editors wrote, 'is passionately and concretely defined the struggle against the capitalism of their days'.

Important here were two essays by Edward Thompson which marked the beginning of his 'positive reassessment' of William Morris as a revolutionary. In the course of this, Thompson developed a theme that had been present throughout Arena - that a 'true' culture is a moral culture and that, despite the efforts of war-mongering leaders, morality remains an essential quality of the 'common people'. This theme was central to the growth of the dissident movement in the party in 1956.

In 1951, a conference on The American Threat to British Culture, organised by the National Cultural Committee of the British CP decided that Arena should be superceded by a new journal that would reach a wider audience. So far as I know, such a journal was never published. The death of Arena marked the death of one partial exception to the highly politicised ideology of the cold war years, an ideology at once so politicised and so 'primitively articulated' that it could hardly be called an ideology at all.[1]

## Historians in the CP

The Communist Party's success in recruiting writers and artists in the popular front period was matched by its recruitment of professional historians who, in 1946, came together in the historians' group. Many of these historians had strong literary interests, and some had come to

1. Interview with Gabriel Pearson, a CP member in the cold war years.

history via literature - a route that was to inform their marxism in unorthodox ways. Whilst writers and artists were seeking to enliven Britain's radical cultural tradition, the work of the historians focused on Britain's radical political heritage. Their predominant interest lay with the transition from feudalism to capitalism, and with the English Revolution of 1640. Communist historians were not alone in their fascination with this period; the English Civil War was an inspiration to many socialists in the Second World War. (Raphael Samuel described how Aneurin Bevan recalled the Putney debates in 1945).[1]

The English Revolution of 1640 proved to be a particularly fruitful topic for communist historians. 'The importance of the Levellers' Movement for British Socialism today', wrote Joseph Needham, the scientist, 'lies in the fact that the ideals of Socialism and Communism are not, as so many people think, something of foreign origin, French or Muscovite, alien to the genius of the English people'.[2] 'English socialists are too ignorant of their great traditions' he went on, an ignorance that the communist historians did something to dispell. This interest in the English Revolution was both inspired and informed by the work of Christopher Hill. In an essay published in 1940, Hill made a convincing case that class struggle, rather than 'Great Men' or religion, was the force behind the revolution. His analysis of the origins and implications of this struggle was to be much debated by historians in the years to come.

Hill argued that, in this period of change,

> "the interests of the new class of capitalist merchants and farmers were temporarily identical with those of the small peasantry and artisans and journeymen." (Hill, 1940:36).

1. Samuel (1979:6)

2. From Needham (1938) quoted in Samuel (1979:25).

Seen in this way, the Revolution was essentially progressive, since it opened the way for the rapid growth of industry and the industrial working class. Nonetheless, its radicalism was limited since in 1640 (unlike in 1940), there was

> ".... no organised working class movement with a vision of a different form of social order and a scientific revolutionary theory, to lead the petty-bourgeiosie to a frontal attack on the power of big capital." (Hill, 1940:68).

Hill's analysis of the sources and nature of historical change inspired a lively debate amongst communist and socialist historians. They were particularly interested in the question of whether feudalism contained the seeds of its own destruction, a question that entailed the consideration of the productive forces and class relations in feudalism and capitalism, and an understanding of the nature of the transition from one mode of production to the next. (It is interesting to note though that these historians, at least in their public work, did not consider the nature of the transition from feudalism to socialsim in the USSR).

Historians in the CP discussed these questions with an intensity and an openness that won them wide-reaching respect, not least from 'King Street', as the party leadership was collectively called. However, it would be a mistake to argue that these historians generated divergent marxisms. Beneath their challenges and disagreements, they shared a common theoretical framework, a 'scientific' marxism, in which a belief in the inevitability of historical progress was coupled with a faith in the historic mission of the CP. Capitalism could no more survive than could feudalism 400 years before, and it was the responsibility of communist historians to disseminate the lessons of the last transition, the better to orchestrate the next. In addition, they treated science as 'a metaphor for human achievement, a measure of progress, a crucial lever for change'. Science 'was a great progressive force in its own right, as well as being a reflection

of those positive forces in society which encouraged it' (Samuel, 1980:80).

In considering the significance of these historians' work, it is important to note the marginality of marxism to history and even more so to economics at that time. The near absence of marxist influence in academic work necessitated the frequent reiteration, and indeed the defence, of basic marxist concepts before historical or economic analysis could begin. This need must have been a factor in the broad degree of agreement between marxist historians; there was neither the political nor the academic 'space' for divergent marxisms to co-exist.

Maurice Dobb, an economist at Cambridge, was a particularly influential figure amongst marxist historians. Having pursued a 'long and lonely championship of Marxism' in the late 1920s and early 1930s, he was more than ready to instruct the new generation of radical students in the 1930s[1]. Dobb made the case repeatedly for an historically informed economics - a case that, unheeded by non-marxist economists, he sought to remedy himself. In 1947 he published Studies in the Development of Capitalism,[2] a key text for party historians since, in accounting for the development of capitalism from 1400 to 1945, it provided both an historical, and more importantly a theoretical overview of the development of capitalism in which Christopher Hill's original essay could be placed.

Dobb had clarified his understanding of Marx on social change some years before.

> "The motive force of change, for Marx, was firstly to be looked for, not in some factor external to a given society, but internal to it; and secondly was to be sought primarily in the antagonistic relations inside the mode of production - in other words, in class antagonism." (Dobb 1947b:16),

1. See Hobsbawm (1967:8).

2. Dobb (1947a).

he argued in 1942. Dobb developed this position in his book, arguing forcibly that the transition from feudalism to capitalism was caused primarily by the development of productive forces within the mode of production, and not by the growth of market forces external to it. Feudalism - like capitalism - contained the 'seeds of its own dissolution', since the development of productive technique, and the consequent change in class relations, generated tensions that the old mode could no longer contain. Dobb denied that there was a period of 'merchant capitalism' between fedualism and capitalism, as he denied subsequently that a 'mixed economy' could ever exist between capitalism and socialism. He argued instead for clearly recognisable modes of production, with relatively brief 'periods of transition' in between. In the 16th and 17th centuries, the merchant class was divided between the conservative traders, who merely used the old mode to their own ends, and the revolutionary capitalists, whe began to organise production on a capitalist basis. It was

> "the subordination of production to capital, and the appearance of this class relationship between capitalist and producer ... (which) is to be regarded as the crucial watershed between the old mode of production and the new." (Dobb, 1947a:143).

In the 20th Century, it was the working class, stronger, more conscious, more purposeful, that represented the force for revolutionary change. Dobb went on to argue that since the industrial revolution, capitalism had been in decline. Now, it was inhibiting progress, underusing industrial plant, precluding technical advance.

Dobb, writing in 1945, predicted quite accurately the Keynesian policies that the state would pursue in an attempt to solve capitalism's latest crisis. But his judgement of 1942 held firm. He doubted then that anyone could

> "seriously deny the substantial validity of Marx's picture (never mind the detail of his drawing) of economic crises growing more and not less serious, of concentration of industrial control and ownership instead of their diffusion, of social tensions becoming more acute,

> instead of what Alfred Marshall called 'the decline of exclusive class advantages in industry'? If there has been any period when the capital-Labour problem has become dominant in political as well as in economic life, it has been, surely, the past 30 years?" (Dobb, 1947a:20).

State measures, such as the Labour Government was then embarking on, could never, Dobb argued, be any more than a very short-term solution to an inherent instability, which in the longer term would serve to strengthen the working class.

Running through Dobb's account of the exhaustion of capitalism was a comparison with the great technological and social potential of the USSR. (Socialism was a 'future that worked', to use Lincoln Steffans' phrase).[1] Counterposing industrial obsolescence under capitalism, with technological advance under socialism, Dobb's work served as a good example of the faith in technology that featured so strongly in marxist thinking at that time.

The usefulness of the feudalism debate to the present day did not go unnoticed. In 1948, the Communist Review announced that the 300th anniversary of the First English Republic would be celebrated in the following year. (Communist Review, 1948:207). By way of introduction, the journal carried a summary of the debate, where the 'correct understanding', and the contemporary relevance of the debate were clearly spelt out. This summary concurred with Dobb's view that the transition between one mode of production and the next - between feudalism and capitalism, between capitalism and socialism - was relatively brief and profound. In 1640,

> "... the social order was still one which suited the feudalists, much as the imperialist-monopoly capitalism of 1948, whilst differing in important respects from the capitalism of 1848 (owing, again, to the advanced stage of contradiction between productive forces and social relations) is nevertheless the same social order at bottom, and has not become Socialism or 'something else' non-Capitalist. (Communist Review, 1948, 209-10).

1. Steffans cited by Samuel (1980). Marxism's lack of influence in economics is evidenced by the long statement on the necessity of understanding capitalism as a particular mode of production with which Dobb began his book. 'Capitalism' and 'mode of production' were foreign concepts to economists, even at that late date.

This introduction held, too, to a revolutionary model of social change.

> "The change from one mode of production to another, involving the substitution of one predominant type of production relations for another, takes place through class struggle, in which the exploiting class of the old order fights hard with all the means at its command (including State power) to retard the change and retain economic ascendancy." (ibid:214).

Only the 'working people' could carry this revolution through.

Whilst the existence of a period of 'merchant capitalism' was officially denied, the notion did not die easily, even in the historians' group. Paul Sweezy, an American economist, joined the debate and made a strong case for the importance of merchant capital in the transition to capitalism.[1] This controversy between Dobb and Sweezy was taken up by the Historians' group, and in 1954, they organised a summer school on The Development of British Society.[2] This debate continued to hold contemporary relevance. Historians were questioning not only the 'purity' of the transition from feudalism to capitalism, but from capitalism to socialism. They were also emphasising that class relations were the motor of social change, now and in the past, a perspective that met with much hostility in the anti-marxist environment of Britain in the cold war.

In the late 1940s, statements on marxist history appeared with increasing frequency in the party press. These statements generally concurred with the understanding of history that we have already noted, an understanding that combined a defence of scientific laws in history with the celebration of Britain's (or at least England's) revolutionary past. The contemporary political relevance of such history was always a - or indeed the - central concern.[3]

1. The contributors to this debate were published in the American journal Science and Society between Spring 1950 and Fall 1953. They have been reprinted in Hilton (1976).

2. Hans Medick described this is a paper he gave at the History Workshop Journal conference, Nov. 1979. This is published in Samuel (1981).

These communists' belief in the contemporary relevance of conflict and revolution, and their understanding of the relatively immutable laws of historical change, could not have gained a sympathetic hearing in the worsening cold war. In the face of heightening hostility and derision directed against communism and marxism alike, communist historians were forced onto the defensive.

One effect of their defensiveness was the limiting of their awareness of capitalism's new strengths. Their belief in the laws of historical change - and the inevitability of historical progress, to socialism and indeed to communism - delayed their recognition that the restructuring of capitalist relations in the early post-war period would ensure a relatively stable future for capitalism.

Despite the hostility with which they were met, communist historians neither ceased their research nor abandoned their attempt to disseminate a politically relevant history. Instead, and I quote Raphael Samuel here,

> "... a dualism opened up in Marxist historical practice. On the one hand, within the confines of the Communist Party Historians Group, or the pages of inner-Party publication, Marxist historians engaged in intense and self-confident theoretical debate, and maintained the classical positions of Marxism intact. But in work directed at a wider audience, they attempted to transpose Marxist concepts into academically acceptable, empirically verifiable forms, to eschew theorising, and to purge the finished text, so far as possible, of overtly political referents." (Samuel, 1979:29).

In their work for a non-communist audience, these historians pursued topics that had previously commanded relatively little attention in marxist history. Whilst they had always protested that they were not 'determinists', they had defended the material base at the cost of studying consciousness. In the early 1950s this neglect was righted, and culture, morality consciousness and indeed human agency featured increasingly in their work. In R. Samuel's judgement, they came to 'champion the cultural', as Edward Thompson's William Morris, or Victor Kiernan's Poems from Iqhal, so clearly

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show. It was, as we shall see, a championship that endured, long past their leaving the party.

In 1952, the journal Past and Present was founded and edited by a group of party and non-party historians. This did not abandon the notion of a scientific history - indeed, it was sub-titled A Journal of Scientific History - but here, the usefulness of 'science' to the historian was limited to the pursuit of 'scientific method' (rather than the formulation of scientific 'laws').

Past and Present provided a valuable forum for this growing focus on consciousness, a focus that Rodney Hilton justified, politically and theoretically with this noticeably undogmatic statement on the role of consciousness in history.

> "It is not enough to study capital, wage labour, and units of production in their economic aspects. Since men make their own history, the historian must know what part the political and social consciousness of the various classes played in advancing or retarding the tempo of capitalist development. Since that consciousness is by no means a direct reflection of the economic activity of these classes, the historian cannot but concern himself with law, politics, art and religion."(Hilton, 1952:42).

This interest in consciousness was very much encouraged by the historian Dona Torr. An invaluable and influential figure in the historians' group, her sensitivity to the struggles of the 'common people' in the 19th Century fostered a respect for an imaginative and open history. A founder member of the Communist Party in 1920, Dona Torr was much respected by 'King Street'. She was also, in Edward Thompsons' words, 'the protector of the historians' group', (and indeed of him), in 'King Street'.[1] (Interview)

This interest in consciousness inspired a concern with the moral. Whilst it would be a mistake to argue that moral questions had not concerned party members in the cold war period, the question of the relation of

1. Interview with E.P.Thompson. Democracy and the Labour Movement, which the historians group compiled, was dedicated to her. (Saville, 1954).

politics to morality does not appear to have been a central one at that time. However, and particularly for those members who came from Nonconformist backgrounds, morality gained a certain topicality from this interest in Britain's culture (since, as has been so well argued elsewhere, Britain's dissenting tradition has been a moral more than a'marxist' one).

Hence, in Victor Kiernan's discussion of William Wordsworth, and, centrally in Edward Thompson's examination of William Morris, 'the moral imagination' was given a not insignificant role in political change. And, as we shall see, this moral sensibility, was to enhance both the rejection of stalinism and the reconsideration of socialism that moved so many party members in 1956; it was another example of the incompleteness of the break with the past evidenced by that traumatic year.

From 1951, the CP had stressed the need to make greater use of specifically British conditions in building socialism. The leadership found itself in the perilous position of encouraging an examination of Britain's 'democratic heritage', by intellectuals, even though unorthodox theoretical interests, with policy implications, would be opened up along the way. Such was the case with Edward Thompson's William Morris. Romantic to Revolutionary, published in 1955. This book had grown out of articles that Thompson had been invited to write for Arena and Modern Quarterly. It was Dona Torr's influence that secured its publication.

Thompson wrote with great sympathy about Morris. He credited Morris with giving form and texture to a vision of a new moral order, where freedom and happiness would replace the iniquitous struggle for survival. He argued too that Morris had coupled his moral insights with a materialist analysis of capitalism and its inevitable doom - a coupling, in Thompson's words, of 'desire and necessity'.

It was clear that Thompson agreed with Morris that moral vision could be a force for change. Against 'capitalist ethics', which 'in all but the soundest centres of working class life' have estranged people by 'fear, suspicion, selfishness and indifference', Thompson placed his faith, with Morris, in a 'really human morality' that has and will evolve through the 'real sufferings, joys, deprivations' of humankind. (Thompson, 1955:808). He emphasised too that Morris' socialism was not incompatible with the socialism of Marx and Engels - human agency had a central place in both.

Thompson's praise for Morris was not limited to the insights to be found in his political and artistic writings. He also had great admiration for Morris' personal qualities as a revolutionary socialist, and the example that he gave. In discussing Morris' political activity, Thompson focused on two issues that were particularly topical in the 1950s: the nature of reformism and the role of the revolutionary party. Thompson traced what he called Morris' 'healthy fear' of reformism, and supported his categorical rejection of reformism as an end in itself.

In Morris' Dream of John Ball,

> "... the 'moderate' is shown, not as an apostate, a black-hearted traitor, but as a self-deceiver, a man who flatters his own conscience to hide his cowardice. In it the whole moral degeneration of reformism is foreseen - its complacency, its 'good intentions', its pious phrases, its blind eye to imperialism, exploitation and war. This temptation Morris, too, had felt. It was perhaps the greatest action of his life when he thrust it aside." (Thompson, 1955:502).

Thompson was more circumspect when considering Morris' changing attitude to the pros and cons of using parliament. Something that Thompson argued for. He argued too that communists should work with other groups in the labour movement. (Unlike in Morris' day, they would be saved from 'personal degradation' and 'political confusion' by the 'support, correction

and discipline of a PARTY'. (Thompson, 1955:539).

Towards the end of his book, Thompson used Morris to indulge in a description of the Communist Party he would like to see. Morris, he argued,

> "... tended to think in terms of a party of cadres, of convinced propagandists and agitators, drawn in the main from the working class, which would in the revolutionary period assume the leadership of the wider organisations of the working class. Always he stressed the subordination of 'individual whims' to the collective decisions of the party; and that the leadership of the party should not be made up of 'government and an opposition', but of those united in their theoretical outlook. Should the party send representatives of Parliament or other bodies, it must be distinctly understood that they went not as individuals, but as delegates of the party, 'under good discipline'. The role of theoretical education within the party he always placed high; and moreover, he thought always of a party of comrades, of men and women changed in their outlook and in themselves, prepared for sacrifice, without any shade of false distinction or personal ambition among them, ready to criticise themselves frankly for their failures - in short, of men and women striving to create new values and new people even within the old society, enjoying both their struggles and their relaxations, conscious of their own comradeship and therefore worthy of building the society of the future." (Thompson, 1955:795).

Within two years, Thompson was to draw again on Morris to develop his critique of the party he had been forced to leave.

Thompson ended his book by celebrating the USSR under Stalin, a celebration that sat uneasily with his analysis of Morris' sensitivity to human agency, to suffering, to 'the moral'. (He removed it from the revised edition). Thompson however was by no means alone in grafting praise for the USSR onto the end of even the most creative pieces of writing, a practice that can only be understood in the context of their commitment to defend the USSR from the attacks that it was receiving. 'The basic tenet ... was that the Soviet Union came first. The Soviet Union was the bastion of world socialism and you had to give it support', recounted Stanley Mitchell, an ex-Party member (Interview). And whilst some people who later left the party, went even further than this and produced legitimations for repression,[1] many party members could not but

feel some disquiet about the nature of Soviet rule. Support for the USSR was based, in part on the identification of technological achievements with progress - an identification that Stalin himself did much to reinforce.

Stalin had painted a very dishonest picture of the effects of rapid industrialisation on the Soviet people. In his attempt to retain popular support for rapid industrialisation, and indeed for the political regime, he had generated the myth that the Soviet people had a higher standard of living than the working class in capitalist countries. As Isaac Deutscher argued as early as 1949, [1] Stalin managed not only to shield the Soviet people from a realistic understanding of life under capitalism, but to protect Western communists from an understanding of the rigours of life under communism. (That the Hungarians in 1956 were protesting that they had not enough to eat was not the least of Western communists' surprises). His glowing statements on the successes of industrial planning under communism confirmed western communists' belief that the USSR was set on a socialist path, since only under socialism could technology flourish. One effect of this identification of technology and socialism was to deflect Western communists from any open examination of the social, political, and legal processes by which technological advances were being achieved.

It would have been extremely difficult for any Western Party member to thoroughly analyse and criticise the Soviet political and legal process, and remain in the party. In the divisive cold war years, the hostility between West and East generated a propaganda war in which the defence of the USSR did not allow for criticism amongst the ranks. The leadership of the Western Communist Parties repeatedly denied adverse reports on

1. See Deutscher (1949). This biography of Stalin could not have failed to disquiet CP members, had they read it.

Soviet and East European life, and lavished abundant praise on the communist regimes for the 'new democracy' and freedoms that they had supposedly achieved. Many party members were doubtless convinced. But, recalled Edward Thompson,

> "... there were some aspects, some areas that we just did not believe. We did believe an awful lot of this scandalous propaganda, but there were other areas that we knew jolly well that Russia was an authoritarian State, would use apologetics about siege mentality and siege economy and wish the place would change." (Interview).

The experience, too, of being a member of a party under attack strengthened solidarity and fraternity within the party. In the face of the suspicion and paranoia that assailed them, the party became an 'all embracing way of life. You live and breathe in the party in a way that Edward Upwood describes in those novels. You self-select your social contacts', recalled Rod Prince (interview). It was, as a result, as personally treacherous to leave the party as it was politically so.

There was in fact a great deal of publically available information about the USSR and Eastern Europe - and plenty to leave the party over. Even without heeding the charges in the capitalist press, party members had more than adequate grounds for questioning democracy and legality in the USSR, particularly after Stalin's death in 1953. They could have discovered that the CPSU Congress hardly ever met; that many of the delegates from the 1930s had disappeared; and that Stalin had risen to a position of unprecedented power in the party. They would have known about some at least of the frequent purges and trials of the 'enemies of socialism', when, on Stalin's death, some 'criminals' earned clemancy, they would have known that the trials were of doubtful legality. Members had learned too that one particularly disturbing occurrence in the communist world, the Soviet-Yugoslavia split, had been caused by a misunderstanding on Stalin's side, and had been 'righted' by a visit by Khrushchev and Bulganin to Yugoslavia in October 1955. The guilt of other communist leaders was

thrown into doubt by this. Gomulka,(the General Secretary of the Polish CP), Annal Pauker (the Rumanian Foreign Secretary), Slansky (the General Secretary of the Czech CP), Kostov (the General Secretary of the Bulgarian CP), Clemitis (Czech Foreign Minister) and Rajk, (a leader of the Hungarian CP), had been removed from office and arrested. Slansky, Kostov, Rajk and Clemitis, and many other lesser officers, had all lost their lives. (Rajk was one particularly popular leader who attained a measure of clemancy even before 1956, when he was reburied with a massive funeral in 1954). Communists would know too that the 'Doctors' Plot' at which ten leading Jewish Kremlin physicians were accused of killing leading military and political figures (such as Zhdanov) was framed since they were cleared very soon after Stalin's death.

Quite apart from this evidence on the failures of the legal process, Western communists could have disagreed with the manner in which charges were pressed. Members could have questioned the humanity and indeed the legitimacy of such trials by confession, particularly since the accused did not have access to adequate defence. The Doctor's Plot and the Slansky trial were evidence too of the growing level of anti-Semitism in the Communist world.

This was further evidenced by the closure of nearly all the Yiddish publications and the Yiddish theatre in Moscow in 1949, and, three years later, by the 'disappearance' of the majority of Yiddish cultural leaders. (They had been arrested and shot, as we later learnt).[1]

Some of the unease that more doubtful members felt was lessened by the relative liberalisation that followed on Stalin's death. Between 1954 and 1956 there were 'fewer issues to leave over', freeing party members

1. Anti-Semitism in the USSR was one aspect of Stalinist rule that J.Saville (interview), professed no knowledge of at all.

to focus their wholehearted attention on the political process in Britain, not in the communist world. They were 'revolted' by British politics at that time, recalled Malcolm MacEwen for the party journalists.

> "We saw ourselves - you may think naively - as democrats, humanists socialists, engaged in the struggle for a humane,free, socialist democracy, and to a considerable extent we still looked to the Soviet Union as a model." (MacEwen, 1976:25).

Being a party member did bring its rewards. The various specialist groups (such as the historians' group) were forums for in-depth and fraternal discussions; some districts were particularly dynamic in their political campaigns. Yorkshire was one example of a district such as this, and it was doubly interesting as it was in Yorkshire that several of the characters of this thesis were based. In Yorkshire, CP members campaigned extensively in the labour movement and did succeed in turning the local trade unions and the local Labour Party leftwards. They worked hard and long in the peace alliance, bringing out a local paper on peace, alerting the labour movement to the dangers of war, and securing tens of thousands of signatures for the peace petitions.

Yorkshire also had a strong tradition of women in politics. There, the local National Assembly of Women group set up women's schools where women discussed politics away from their husbands or fathers. The hope was that these schools would challenge the women's views about the relationship between femininity and political activity; that they would undermine the identification of some women as party 'wives'.[1]

Yorkshire district also serves as an interesting example of the relationship between central leadership and local campaigns. It had a local leadership

1. See Davis, (1982).

that initiated actions and inspired support. One effect of this was that party members were able to engage in a range of local activities even if, like Dorothy Thompson and her closest comrades, they felt themselves to be 'at war with the party machine' (interview). In practice though, the Yorkshire leadership mirrored the centralist structure to which the party was committed. (Marion Ramelson, the Yorkshire district organiser, argued that the role of the leadership even at the local level, was to educate the membership to understand the correctness of the party line, and to enthuse them to campaign ceaselessly for it).[1] Yorkshire district was small enough, and lively enough, to ensure that members felt important and involved, and it did hold out the possibility - as with Edward Thompson from 1953 to 1956 - that members be elected onto the district committee, thereby becoming leaders themselves.

None of the activists I interviewed shared Doris Lessing's depiction of the party 'centre' in The Golden Notebook:

> "All the communists I know - that is, the ones of any intelligence have the same attitude towards 'the centre' - that the Party has been saddled with a group of dead bureaucrats who run it, and that the real work gets done in spite of the centre." (Lessing, 1973:165).

Instead, their dislike of the upper echelons of the hierarchy was not expressed in such personal terms. It was 'King Street', rather than individual leaders, that was seen as the source of the worst aspects of party politics. Individual party leaders were in fact regarded with a fair measure of respect; 'the Communist leadership in my mind brought together a group of quite outstanding militants - outstanding in any sense', recounted John Saville, and criticisms did not extend to them. A result of this separation between the institution of 'King Street' and the officers who

1. See Ramelson (1952).

sat there was that criticisms of centrist rule never found theoretical expression. Instead, they were limited to (abundant) jokes and gossip; members shared but did not develop their concerns. We have already noted how the division of the world into two hostile camps generated a 'Two Camp Theory', of knowledge and of politics, where the peacemaking, progressive and anti-imperialist USSR stood opposite the war-mongering, stagnating and imperialist West. We have noted too how there were several 'dualisms' in the work of CP intellectuals; between for example their celebration of the Soviet road to socialism, and doubts about the democracy and legality of Stalin's rule; between great respect for individual leaders, and jokes and gossip about 'King Street'. That there were hidden inconsistencies in such a black and white world view does help us to understand both how later dissidents remained loyal before 1956, and the nature of their revolt.

Dualism was not confined to later dissidents. In fact, it was an integral feature of communist politics of this time, reaching much further than the public affirmations and private doubts of sections of the membership. Whilst the CP continued to describe itself as the party of principle, as the only party that had not abandoned the socialist ideal, its politics often belied any such claim. It declared itself to be anti-imperialist and vigourously denounced the imperialism of the capitalist West, all the while supporting Soviet supremacy in Eastern Europe; it preached democracy but practiced centralism; it professed to believe in sexual equality but did not campaign consistently to overcome gender differences within the CP or outside it; it called for unity with the Labour Party, but rejected many aspects of the labour tradition.

The charge of duality is hardly a new one to lay at communism's door, but it has special significance for the early 1950s because of the events of 1956. When Khrushchev exposed so many of the darker sides of communist

rule in the USSR and Eastern Europe, party members had to publically recognise not only that tyranny and unjust repression had abounded under 'Socialism', but that they, by remaining silent in the cold war years, were implicated in what had occurred. The organisation and politics of the British no less than the Soviet party were thrown into question, and communists were now faced with the task of accounting for the 'mistakes' and 'crimes' that their parties had committed, and with ensuring that such an unhappy history could not recur. It is to an examination of this process of reconsideration that we shall now turn.

# CHAPTER 5.

## THE CRISIS IN THE BRITISH COMMUNIST PARTY, AND THE CASE OF THE REASONER

In the early months of 1956, the British Communist Party 'had not the slightest inkling of the storm that was about to burst upon it'.[1] In the pages of the party press, the USSR was still held up as an inspiration for socialists everywhere, and as the leader of the campaign for peace. Khrushchev's 'Secret Speech' at the 20th congress of the CPSU in February 1956 dealt a bitter blow to this Soviet image, for he denounced the rigours of the Stalin regime in terms that threw doubt upon the very democracy, legality and indeed the humaneness of the USSR's past.

Communist parties from around the world sent leading delegates to the 20th congress, (which was only the second congress of the CPSU since the war). From Britain, Harry Pollitt (general secretary), George Matthews (assistant general secretary), and Palme-Dutt (vice chairman) all attended. Whilst foreign delegates were barred from the closed session at which Khrushchev's speech was made, the Stalin era was also criticised in the open sessions, leaving the British leadership with the problem of quite how much to disclose to their membership. They were slow to act. In reports on the congress in the Daily Worker, praise for Soviet foreign and economic policy took pride of place, and when any reports on the 'weakening of collective leadership' in the USSR did appear, it was described as a problem of the past. However, party members must have been shocked by statements such as this rather abrupt one from Mikoyan:

> "The principle of collective leadership is elementary for a party of the Lenin type. Yet for 20 years we did not have collective leadership but the cult of the individual. This had a harmful effect." DW (17.2.56)

The Daily Worker assured its readers that the 'cult' was ended (Stalin was not named) and that collective leadership had been fully restored.

The following day, the Daily Worker carried a fuller summary of Khrushchev's

1. MacEwen (1976:24).

speech in open session. Stalin was still not named. Instead, the villains were

> "Beria and his gang (who) had attempted to remove State security agencies from the control of the Party and the Soviet Government, fabricating false charges ..." (DW 18.2.56)

Now, the 'innocent' had been rehabilitated, 'mistakes' put right, and, proclaimed George Matthews,

> "there is not the faintest shadow of a doubt that after the 20th Congress the Soviet people and the Party which leads them will astonish the world with their deeds." (DW 20.2.56).

The membership were given only very limited space to comment on these disturbing revelations in the party press. The Daily Worker introduced a 'Forum' section for readers' letters on the 20th congress, but almost as soon as it was introduced, it was taken away.[1] Whilst these readers did not hesitate to name Stalin as the subject of the 'cult', not all were critical. Indeed, one writer made the very understandable point that

> "...most of our lives we have placed Stalin on a level with Marx, Engels and Lenin. We cannot, at a drop of a hat, make a complete volte face overnight."(DW 9.3.56).

On the 15th March, the Daily Worker carried a general reply to letter writers' from George Campbell. This was clearly an attempt to silence the 'chorus of criticism' that the 20th congress had engendered. Campbell took the readers to task for missing "... the tremendous importance for the advance to Communism, of the complete restoration of inner-Party democracy in the Soviet Union," (DW 15.3.56) (and justified the British party's past silence as a necessary measure in helping the USSR to reach its present strength).

1. Malcolm MacEwen, features editor on the Daily Worker, tells how he had the greatest difficulty in getting any of the flood of letters on the 20th congress published. See MacEwen (1976).

World News and Views, the weekly journal of the Communist Party, also gave little space to the 'cult of the individual' theme, and none to readers letters. The approaching 24th congress of the British CP was used in an attempt to displace any interest in the past congress of the CPSU, even to the extent of only printing letters on topics to come before congress. That British members should concern themselves with matters close to home was legitimised by quoting from Pollitt's speech to the 20th congress, where he had compared the 'doubt and confusion' of British politics with the 'confidence and vitality' of the Soviet Union; communism did after all have rather further to go in Britain.

Whilst the British leadership persisted in its attempt to stem any further questioning of communist rule, news that Khrushchev had made a 'secret speech' was leaked to the world's press. The Times carried a fairly full report. This told how Krushchev had painted ' a vivid picture of a regime of 'suspicion, fear, and terror' which had prevailed under Stalin,' (The Times, 17.3.56), in which Stalin had been personally responsible for generating a terror so pervasive that even members of the Politburo feared for their lives. Stalin had succeeded not merely in eliminating his opponents: he had also created a personality cult that pre-empted any attempt to critically assess his rule.

Khrushchev's intention was fairly clear: he hoped to win popular support for himself and his policies by presenting an image of himself as the 'good guy', exposing the evils and righting the wrongs of his predecessor. But Khrushchev's account was a dubious one, not least because it belied any attempt to analyse why and indeed how Stalin had acted as he did. Any such analysis would risk the exposure of the fact that Khrushchev and his supporters had a great deal of blood on their hands too (something that Khrushchev almost gave away in his speech when he described how so many of

communism's 'best sons' had been shot). How far these 'destalinisers' would destalinise themselves was clearly a rather embarrassing question - and one that the British leadership were anxious to avoid.

The party press did not report on Khrushchev's 'secret speech'. World News and Views avoided any further comment on any aspect of the 20th congress till the 31st March, when it printed a translation of an article by Togliatti from L'Unita two weeks before, (the day before the speech was leaked).[1]

Togliatti's article was significant in that he was the first (and indeed almost the only) leading figure in any Communist Party who attempted to analyse why Stalin had acted as he did. Stalin was partially exonerated as a result. Togliatti argued that Stalin was a misguided communist, acting in good faith. The terrors of his regime were not a result of any evil intent on Stalin's part, but of a 'theoretical error' that Stalin had mistakenly held dear.

Stalin's 'error' according to Togliatti, was the belief that the enemies of socialism would increase as socialism unfolded; it turned out to be an extremely pernicious one, for Stalin grew ever more fearful of the dangers to the regime (and to himself) of an increasing number of 'enemies within', and sought to eradicate the danger by annihilating any suggestion of opposition. The security forces (which had fallen into the hands of people who Togliatti saw as being truly evil), had exploited Stalin's weakness. They were the perpetrators of this 'reign of terror' that operated in their interests, but in Stalin's name.

Togliatti did charge Stalin with a 'successive error', one that he didn't attempt to explain so thoroughly. This error was the substitution of

1. The response of the Italian Communist Party and of Togliatti to the 'secret speech' is described in an interview with Rossana Rossanda (Socialist Register, 1976).

personal for collective leadership, thereby removing any checks to his actions and generating a personal cult. From this 'flowed defects, errors, mistakes ...' (WN and V, 31.3.56), a description that begged the question of how far Stalin's 'disciples' were responsible for what occurred.

Togliatti's attempt to 'understand' Stalin did not receive any editorial comment in the British party press, presumably since the leadership were still living in the hope that, left well alone, the issues raised by the 20th congress would all go away. The 24th congress of the British CP, focusing almost entirely on political work in Britain, was already in session. Soviet society was not analysed but was confidently praised, (a public confidence it transpired that was decided upon at a stormy 'secret session'.)[1] But as further reports on Khrushchev's 'Secret Speech' appeared in the non-CP press; as leaders in Eastern Europe changed their policies; as Communist party leaders in other European countries printed public statements; and as a growing minority of the British membership continued to protest at the leadership's refusal to engage in, or indeed to allow any debate in the party press; 'King Street' could remain silent no more. At the end of April 1956, World News and Views carried two articles by Pollitt entitled 'The 20th Congress of the CPSU - and the Role of Stalin'. These articles did not specifically refer to Khrushchev's 'Secret Speech', but they did cover much ground that was new to readers. Pollitt began and ended his account of Stalin's Russia by maintaining that the British leaders had not 'defended mistaken policies knowing them to be mistaken'. They had acted in 'good faith' when they had lent uncritical support to Stalin's rule. The British leadership never did come clean about how much they had actually known. This claim of 'good faith' was a highly

1. See MacEwen (1976:26).

ambiguous one, and many dissidents were driven to conclude that they had known a very great deal, all along.

Pollitt was not as generous to Stalin as Togliatti had been, laying greater emphasis on how Stalin had elevated himself above party rule, and following Khruschev in holding Stalin personally responsible for some of the 'wrongful acts' of his period in power. Pollitt also exonerated other Soviet leaders, arguing that it was only for the sake of 'unity' that they had not challenged Stalin. Clearly Khrushchev's shattering revelations and the British leadership's rather half-baked response were threatening unity in the British party, and in May, R.Palme-Dutt, a member of the national executive, attempted to stop this limited appraisal of the Stalin era short. Dutt failed; in fact, he so angered and insulted the concerned in the party that the debate did anything but die. 'What are the essential threads of the Great Debate?' he asked. (Palme-Dutt, 1956a:194).

> "Not about Stalin. That there should be spots on any sun would only startle an inveterate Mithra-worshipper. Not about the now recognised abuses of the security organs in a period of heroic ordeal and achievement of the Soviet Union. To imagine that a great revolution can develop without a million cross-currents, hardships, injustices and excesses would be a delusion fit only for ivy-tower dwellers in fairyland who still have to learn that the thorny path of human advance moves forward, not only with unexampled heroism, but also with accompanying baseness, with tears and blood." (Ibid:194).

The party press was understandably beseiged by a flood of readers' letters, and some of these were published. (Dutt even published apology).[1] One particularly challenging letter was written by John Saville.[2] Here, Saville itemised the 'problems of the CP' to which, he believed, neither the Soviet nor the British leadership were giving sufficiently serious and critical attention. Taking issue with the official Soviet explanations

1. See Palme-Dutt (1956b)
2. See WN and V (19.5.56).

for the crimes and mistakes of the Stalin era - explanations in terms of 'historical inevitability' and 'the assumption of personal power by Stalin' he called on the British party to recognise that they had been wrong, both in giving uncritical support to past Soviet policy and in accepting present Soviet explanations for past mistakes. He criticised the British party for failing to recognise the full extent of the crimes - the 'arbitrary arrests, deportations, executions' - that had taken place, so anxious had they been to publically deny that a socialist state could act in such a way. The way forward, Saville argued, was for the British CP to recognise its failings; to actually admit that they 'fell into the error' not of defending the USSR <u>despite</u> its mistakes, but of defending the mistakes themselves.

Neither Palme-Dutt's apology nor the continuing attempts of the leadership to focus attention on British politics were to satisfy those many members who shared John Saville's view that the only way through this crisis was by an analysis of communism's failings, an analysis that should include the implications for the British party of its failure to be critical of the CPSU. The party leadership did two things. Firstly, Harry Pollitt, the general secretary, resigned and John Gollan took his place. Secondly, it issued a long statement entitled <u>The Lessons of the 20th Congress of the CPSU</u>[1] in which a rather patchy summary of Stalin's rule was coupled with the promise to investigate internal democracy in the British party. (It set about this with characteristic slowness, appointing the commission's officers in July and not arranging a meeting till September).

Whilst this decision to set up a commission was something of an advance, internal critics were wise to the fact that the leadership would only meet the challenge of the times under pressure. One issue that critics were particularly concerned with was the extent of the British party's

1. Communist Party (1956).

subservience to Moscow, and it was on this question that Edward Thompson succeeded in having a letter printed in World News and Views, (30.6.56). Thompson focused here on the implications of the British party's subservience to Moscow on the party's success in Britain. Drawing on the example of Lysenkoism, Edward Thompson suggested that 'if we had attended more closely to our own conditions, we might have grown rich crops!

(WN & V, 30.6.56:408).[1]

For so long as the CP sustained a'dogmatic monotone, without individual variation, without moral inflexion, without native dialect' (ibid: 408), it could not hope to win popular support. The 'British people', he argued, 'do not understand and will not trust a Monolith without a moral tongue'. (ibid: 408-9). Nor would they entrust their hard-won democratic liberties to a party that failed to recognise their importance under capitalism, or to guarantee that they would be maintained under communism.

Such criticism could not go unheeded, and in this same issue of World News and Views, George Matthews rejected Thompson's arguments under the heading of 'A Caricature of Our Party'. However, it was a caricature that had considerable appeal, especially since The Observer, three weeks before, had devoted the whole of one issue to the unexpurgated text of Khrushchev's 'Secret Speech'.[2]

The party was in crisis. Meetings were heated and discussion amongst members went on long into the night. Party leaders travelled up and down the country, and tried to quell what was now a raging storm. Their success was patchy. Rod Prince recalled a meeting at Ipswich that was addressed by Emile Burns, a member of the national executive. Burns was met with

1. Lysenko was a Soviet geneticist who believed that changes in the environment altered the hereditary potential of organisms, such as seeds. See Wersky (1978) for an interesting account of the implications of Lysenkoism.

3. See The Observer (10.6.56)

uproar when he attempted to tell the meeting that nothing, really, was wrong.[1] There was a heated meeting too of the historians' group, at which James Klugman attempted to divert the historians' concern with the 20th congress back onto their 'very important' work on Britain. (The historians' group responded by passing an unsuccessful resolution calling on the leadership to do just the reverse). It is worth noting too that some of the leadership were as shattered as some of the membership, and could not always toe the party line themselves. Edward Thompson recalled how Mick Bennet, who had been district secretary in Yorkshire some time before, told an astounded Yorkshire district committee that not only had 'their party' ceased to exist for a time in the Soviet Union, but that Stalin himself had written parts of the British Road[2].

More than anything else, it was the British leadership's failure to openly examine the issues that Khrushchev had raised that discredited it in the eyes of later dissidents. In avoiding an examination of Stalinism both in the CPSU and indeed in the British party, the leadership angered and frustrated the growing number of members who were demanding ever more strongly that the leadership produce a 'proper marxist explanation' of what had occurred.

It would be a mistake to believe that the pressure to debate the issues at the 20th congress stemmed merely from shock at Khrushchev's revelations, and guilt at past silence. We have already seen how party members could have known a fair deal about the darker sides of Stalinism; that there had been plenty of issues to leave over. There was, in the spring of 1956, a growing feeling that the 20th congress provided the party with an invaluable

1. Rod Prince (interview).
2. Edward Thompson (interview).

opportunity to 'come clean' about its past, and to thoroughly examine its 'errors'.

> "Whatever else they thought, they all believed that the Communist Party could go through this period and come out of it in a way which would not inhibit its future development, and in fact could strengthen it. Providing it, as a party, was prepared openly to acknowledge its very serious errors and mistakes and so forth, I think a lot of people would have been very happy with it,"

recalled John Saville (interview), speaking here of himself, and his closest associates. To quote Edward Thompson writing seventeen years later,

> "... few of us, in the depth of our hearts, did not wish for the siege mentality of Communism to fall away. Thus there is a sense in which, even before 1956, our solidarity was given not to Communist states in their existence, but in their potential - not for what they were but for what - given a dimunition in the Cold War - they might become.
>
> Hence, whether consciously or unconsciously, we were expectant of exactly what occurred in 1956. These 'revelations' represented less of a rupture in our understanding than a fulfilment of our half-conscious hopes." (Thompson, 1973:2 ).

It was in this spirit that the Reasoner was born.

## The Reasoner

Through the Spring of 1956, party members had written furiously not only to the party press, but to each other. When it became clear that the party press was not going to publish their letters or discuss the crisis their party was in, several critical members decided to publish a journal of their own. By taking the unprecidented step of publishing an independent journal within the Communist Party, they hoped to force the party press to open up, and allow the discussion they were so concerned should take place.

The Reasoner was produced in Yorkshire by Dorothy Thompson, Edward Thompson, John Saville, Constance Saville, and Ken Alexander, several of whom were involved in the maverick historians' group. It was distributed by a group

of local party members who shared the misgivings of these party intellectuals. It was the product of a very great deal of discussion within the party.

> "We printed 1,200 I think of the first copy. We sent about a thousand of them to people we knew because we were in the party for twenty years or more, and we knew an awful lot of people. The interesting thing is that in 90% of the cases, we were right - these were the people who were worried about exactly the things that we were." (Dorothy Thompson, interview).

They were very careful not to offend the accepted canons of party behaviour: they did not give interviews to the non-party press, nor did they organise themselves as a faction within the party. They still, as we shall see, came under increasing pressure to cease publication, and they would have capitulated had they not been overtaken by events.

The Reasoner was a duplicated journal, 8" x 5", with an average of 37 pages. It ran to three issues in all. Subtitled A Journal of Discussion each issue began with a quote from Marx: 'To leave error unrefuted is to encourage intellectual immorality'. John Saville and Edward Thompson were the named editors. Each issue carried several articles on topics of interest to the communist movement, from Britain and beyond, and some often very self-critical correspondence. They also included quite extended editorial comment, and it is to the editors writing in the first issue that we shall now turn.

In 'Why We Are Publishing', the editors stated that their central purpose was to 'loosen-up' discussion in the party. By printing contributions that were critical of orthodox views, and translations from the communist and socialist press elsewhere, they hoped to inspire a genuine reconsideration of the party's past. Lively debate, they argued, had long been missing in the party, and at high cost. 'Theoretical clarity' had been blurred and 'intellectual cynicism' had gained ground. The 20th congress had inspired discussion anew. This discussion revealed the damage that past silence had done. It showed

> "... deep disagreements on the very meaning of 'Marxism': the presence of grossly irrational and authoritarian attitudes intermingled with claims to a 'scientific analysis': the hardening of theory into dogma, of Socialist education into indoctrination: the absence of a clear common understanding, indeed at times of any common terminology, on fundamental questions of democracy, political morality and Party education."( Thompson and Saville, 1956a:2).

And fundamental questions had been raised - on the role and structure of the CP; on democracy, morality, justice; on the nature of socialism itself. For the Reasoner editors, the solution could be sought in 'a re-birth of Socialist principle' - a re-birth that would redeem the party. The editors looked to the future with hope.

The absence of 'socialist principle' in the British party was the unifying theme in the Reasoner's critical assessment of the party's theoretical failings and political mistakes. Edward Thompson did much to develop this theme, taking the British party (himself included) to task for participating in the reduction of marxism to dogma; for allowing 'correct formulations' to take the place of the study of social realities, past and present; for subordinating British interests to those of the Soviet Union: for denying 'liberty'. And he called for a new leadership, 'truly representative of the best of the British working class'. (Thompson, 1956a: 15).

Many dissidents no doubt shared this view that the old leadership could not change its spots, and would have to be replaced. And, just as they demanded a marxist explanation for Stalinism in the USSR, they sought a marxist explanation for dogmatism here. It was to the structure of the party that they understandably turned. The debate on democratic centralism, even in the Reasoner, was constrained by the belief that political work through an organised and disciplined Communist Party was the best method of winning effective support for socialism. Any reconsideration of structure was limited to the question, not of whether the CP should

be centrally organised, but of how flexible this centralism should be. Hence writers such as Ken Alexander in the first issue, often made a compelling case against the way that democratic centralism had evolved, but ended up challenging the workings but not the structures of party power.[1] What is more, not all dissidents believed that democratic centralism was the central issue of the day. Doris Lessing, for one, made just the opposite case, arguing that to focus discussion on party rules amounted to little more than an abdication of personal responsibility.

> "There is no set of rules that can set us free from the necessity of making fresh decisions, every day, of just how much of our individual responsibility we are prepared to delegate to a central body - whether it is the communist party, or the government of the country we live in, be it a communist or a capitalist government ..." (Lessing, 1956:36)

"The safeguard against tyranny, now, as it always has been, is to sharpen individuals,to strengthen individual responsibility, and not to delegate it." (Lessing, 1956:36).

Doris Lessing was counterposing to democratic centralism the most difficult issue that these party members were having to face: the role of individual responsibility in political life. The Reasoner did not print lengthy justifications of why party members had not spoken out before. Familiar extenuations did appear, along the lines of how any criticisms of the USSR would have only helped 'the other side', or that whilst they feared the worst of Stalin's rule, they had only wanted to believe the best. What these critics clearly shared was the shock and the humiliation of having the worst features of the system they had defended thrown into the open by the Soviet leaders themselves. For the more naive, these painful emotions were compounded by disillusion; and for some of the less naive,

1.See Alexander (1956). G.D.H.Cole also sent in an unsolicited article on democratic centralism. (See Cole, 1956).

by guilt. But these emotional responses did not always help in the understanding of the past that was so very necessary to a genuine reappraisal of communist politics. This, Doris Lessing put particularly well when she attacked the dishonesty of claiming regret or guilt.

> "The facts are that, up to the 20th Congress, if those of us who knew what was going on - and it was perfectly possible to know, if one kept one's mind open and read the plentiful evidence available - if we had said what we thought, in the only place open to us, the capitalist press, we would have been cast out by the party and branded as traitors, and inevitably isolated by bitterness and recrimination from a world movement in which we believed, and of which we wished to remain a part.
>
> That is why we kept silence. We believed that Communism had a vitality and a moral vigour that would triumph over the brutality and intellectual dishonesty that had undermined it. We were right to think so. But we did keep silence, knowing exactly what we were doing; and for precisely the same reasons that made the leadership of the Communist parties of the West absolutely right about the great economic advances of Communism; and absolutely dishonest about the defeat of liberty and decency that was the price paid for these advances. What is the use of saying 'We should have done this, - or that'. The fact is, that we did keep quiet, and if the same situation arose, we would probably keep quiet again. What we have to do is to make it impossible for the same situation to arise."
>
> But above all, we must accept our responsibility for having been part of the thing, our responsibility for the good and for the bad.
>
> We have all been part of the terrible, magnificent, bloody, contradictory process, the establishing of the first Communist regime in the world - which has made possible our present freedom to say what we think, and to think again creatively." (Lessing, 1956b:12-13).

And John Saville echoed this sentiment that guilt was misplaced. He maintained that he felt no guilt for not speaking out before:

> "Most of my activity had been directed inside Britain and against British imperialism. And I had no doubts that on balance I was, as it were, politically on the right side ... I was wholly prepared to acknowledge all sorts of mistakes, political mistakes. All I am saying is that anybody who is in politics for twenty five years cannot do any other. They all make very serious mistakes." (John Saville, interview).

The Reasoner did begin to 'think creatively'. Now that the need to defend Soviet 'socialism' had passed, all areas of communist theory and practice were called into question, from the broadest issue of 'what is socialism' to the finer details of party strategy. Very many old comforts had been destroyed; such as the belief that the people of the Eastern bloc had

enjoyed a rising standard of living under communist rule, or that, despite any temporary setbacks, the Soviet Union had always been set on a communist road, or that British communism was relatively autonomous of Soviet influence, or that by defending the Soviet security forces, they were defending socialism. But now, all their inarticulated criticisms of the party leadership could be fully, and creatively expressed. This was something that the Reasoner did particularly well. In criticising the leadership for attempting to control discussion, the Reasoner developed a critique of dogmatism and rigidity in the party. In criticising the leadership for failing to admit the extent of the crisis, and to think and to lead independently of Moscow, the Reasoner made a powerful case for the theoretical and political autonomy of the British party. And in criticising the leadership's failure to be responsible to criticism, the Reasoner came to reassert the importance of open discussion and democratic influence in party life.

These criticisms were the more keenly felt as they showed the British leadership persisting with the very practices that the 20th congress had exposed. Indeed, the British leadership seemed bent on denying that the 'cult of the individual' had any broader significance at all, and whilst it did eventually denounce Stalin, the individual, it was less than willing to recognise Stalinism, the institution. In an attempt to quell this uncomfortable questioning in the party ranks, the leadership fell back on the age old cry of party unity - a cry that the Reasoner denounced, since it made 'loyalty' more important than 'truth', and an erroneous solidarity better than a period of open debate, from which a genuine unity could grow. The leadership was also attempting to divert attention from Moscow to Britain, and the Reasoner responded by focusing on the features of the British tradition that had been lost or denied by the party's sub-servience to Moscow.

The idea that greater sensitivity to 'British conditions' was the key to communist advance was developed in the editorial of the Reasoner 2. The editors argued here that in all the discussions so far ran a common thread:

> "... the problem of disentangling the understanding of the essential character of Socialist society from the specific and concrete historical problems of the Soviet Union - of achieving an understanding of Socialism both enriched and chastened by the experience of the Soviet people - and of returning with fresh eyes to our own people our own problems, our own traditions." (Thompson and Saville, 1956b:4).

And a new understanding of socialism was needed, an understanding based not only on living standards, but on 'new social relations, new values and opportunities, a new, more generous, more just; and less selfish way of life'. (Ibid:6). It would take into account 'the intelligence, experience, democratic traditions, and organisational maturity of the British working class'. (Ibid:6). Not only their integrity, but their appeal depended on this:

> "We can't go round and state an honest case for the party new. We are still playing 'about turn' when the Soviet leaders say so, and the workers feel, therefore, that we can quite easily defend similar mistakes and crimes in the future as readily as we did in the past. They will not trust us, unless we change our attitude - and the party leadership shows no sign of doing so. (Daly, 1956:27).

Pessimistic that the leadership would meet this challenge (and to the regret of the Reasoner editors), Lawrence Daly left the party.

The third and last issue of the Reasoner was printed before the Soviet invasion of Hungary and distributed, with an additional editorial, as Budapest was attacked. The editors had already decided that this would be the final number, since the Reasoner was in danger of becoming a diversion from the very discussion that it had set out to foster. The editors had been keeping up a long struggle to retain the right to publish independently in the party. They argued that they were not breaking party rules, but interpreting them more liberally. They argued too that they had to publish independently since the official party press was

suppressing discussion, discussion that was very necessary in a time of crisis such as this. Indeed, they stated that no committee had 'the right to enforce opinions upon the membership, to discipline the minds of comrades'. (Thompson and Saville, 1956c:38). And they challenged the political committee which controlled the party press to bring out a new, serious journal that would make individual initiatives like their own unnecessary.

The actual stages of the battle between the Reasoner editors and the party leadership were spelled out twenty years later by John Saville. He described how he and Edward Thompson were twice summonsed to appear before a specially convened sub-committee of the Yorkshire district CP and were called on to cease publication. When they refused, they were called to a meeting of the executive committee in London. They knew that they would be expelled or suspended if they brought out another issue. But they still hoped to be able to change the party 'from below', and they went ahead with the third and last issue. Suspended they were, for three months.

The third issue of the Reasoner is a truly historic document. What had been topics for discussion had become causes for protest, since it was clear that neither the Soviet leadership, nor the British leadership, had changed their spots.

The majority of this last issue had been printed before the Soviet invasion of Hungary. It carried a range of material, including an unsolicited article by G.D.H.Cole on democratic centralism; an article by John Saville on the 'stickiest' periods in party history; [1] an article by Bob Davies[2] on the historical and theoretical questions that the party should ask of the 1937-8 purges; and two articles on destalinisation in Eastern Eurcpe[3].

1. See Saville (1956)
2. See Davies (1956)
3. See Ronald Meek (1956) and Ursula Wasserman (1956).

But with the Soviet invasion of Hungary, Edward Thompson and John Saville revised their editorial, and added a supplement, 'Through the Smoke of Budapest', written by Edward Thompson. In the judgement of the editors,

> "Even the urgency of the Egyptian crisis cannot disguise the fact that the events of Budapest represent a crucial turning point for our Party. The aggression of British imperialism is uglier and more cynical in degree than previous imperialist aggressions. But the crisis in world Communism is now different in kind. (Thompson and Saville, 1956c:1).

Unrest had been brewing in Hungary for some years. Following on Stalin's death in 1953, the new Soviet leadership had allowed some slow and uneven liberalisation to occur, in order to secure greater stability. In Poland, Wladyslaw Gomulka, a Polish communist, was made the new premier following the Poznan riots. He promised 'democraticisation' and free elections, but succeeded in containing popular unrest on a more limited programme of social change. In Hungary however, the tension between the popular demand for a democratic national leadership and the Stalinist will for control resulted, tragically, in the Soviet repression of a national revolution.

From 1949 on, popular communist figures had met their deaths in Hungary at the hands of an increasingly unpopular Stalinist leadership. When Stalin died their power was 'diluted' by some of the surviving more popular figures, such as Janos Kadar and Imre Nagy, who finally achieved Government office. Nagy, once in office, proceeded to introduce a programme of political amnesty and party reform, generating the demand for greater liberalisation from journalists, writers and others in Hungary. Nagy however was removed from office in 1955, but by now these demands could not be silenced: indeed, they were more widely and more strongly expressed, as evidenced by the ceremonial reburial of Laslo Rajk, a victim of 1949, which 200,000 people had attended. This symbolic demonstration was followed by Imre Nagy's readmission to the party - and by more urgent and more concrete

demands for change. Students organised themselves into a union, and produced proposals for a more democratic government under Nagy, and took to the streets of Budapest when they were not met. After a stormy demonstration, (at which a statue of Stalin was smashed to the ground), Nagy was finally appointed Prime Minister.

The old leadership had however performed one last act whilst in power: they had called in Soviet troops and tanks to put down any further popular revolt. The announcement of Nagy's appointment took place against the background of street battles in Budapest and demonstrations elsewhere. Then followed a period of intensive activity, in which the fighting escalated, workers' councils were formed, a general strike declared. Nagy's Government ordered the Soviet troops to ceasefire, and promised the Hungarian people that they would withdraw. This they slowly did, but as Nagy's Government got down to the business of working in a coalition with non-communist parties, British and French troops entered Suez, and new Soviet troops were reported to be entering Hungary from Miskolc.

The editorial in this final number faced the responsibility that British communists shared for repression in Eastern Europe. Perhaps 'counter-revolutionary forces' had inflamed popular unrest, but the fact remained that

> "The working people and students of Budapest were demonstrating against an oppressive regime which gave them no adequate democratic channels for expressing the popular will ... The criminal blunder of unleashing Security Police and Soviet forces against these crowds provoked the mass of the people to take arms, in the name of independence, liberty and justice, against an oppression that was operated in the name of Communism ....
>
> In this crisis, when the Hungarian people needed our solidarity, the British Communist Party has failed them. We cannot wait until the 21st Congress of the CPSU, when no doubt the attack on Budapest will be registered as another 'mistake'."(Thompson and Saville, 1956c:2).

'Where is my Party in Hungary?' 'And what is it?' asked Edward Thompson (1956b: supp.1), now that the smoke was rising above Budapest. Thompson

protested that the Daily Worker, 'from start to finish ... in the name of all of us - has sent the wrong advice and sent it to the wrong address'. (Thompson, 1956b:supp,4). In calling for 'no vengeance' for the 'violators of Socialist legality' the Daily Worker, and by implication the party leadership, had denied the over-riding need for truth. Failing to see the positive significance of Gomulka's rise to power, the leadership were too hasty, and indeed too Stalinist, in condemning the Hungarian uprising. He saw the use of troops in Hungary as a source of shame, and not, as the party demanded, a cause for support:

> "No, no, no, no! This is not the work for us. Shame on this indecent haste, shame on this breach of solidarity, shame on those who wished to rush in the moral armaments of the British working class behind Gero's security police, to destroy these young students and young workers in the streets! ....
>
> Our membership has had enough ." (Thompson, 1956b:supp.4).

Edward Thompson no longer minced his words. He charged the British leadership with siding with Salinism. And he condemned those aspects of Stalin's theory that history had shown to 'wrong'. The belief that the class struggle would intensify and 'enemies within' grow in number; the restriction of discussion; the 'cult of the Party' with its 'iron discipline'; the mechanical view of human consciousness: all this amounted to a 'mechanical idealism', to 'Leninism turned into stone'. (Ibid:supp.6). Stalinism, he went on, had infected communist politics everywhere:

> "Stalinism was not 'wrong things' about which 'we could not know' but distorted theories and degenerate practices about which we knew something, in which, to some degree, we shared, and which our leadership supports today. Who does not know that our moral atrophy, our military vocabulary and structure, our paternalist outlook upon the people and their organisations, our taste for disseminating 'wrong information' our fear of popular initiatives independent of our guidance, our dislike of criticism, our secrecy and occasional bad faith with our friends - all these have crippled our propaganda, isolated us, and robbed our work of its right reward? And who does not know that it was our rank-and-file that was tainted least with these things, and our leadership most?" (Ibid:supp.7)

The hearts of both the British and the Soviet leaderships lay 'with the Soviet tanks'. Already, they had fresh blood on their hands, perpetuating the 'mechanical idealism' which, 'mounted on Soviet tanks ... fired through the smoke at the workers and young people of Budapest'. (Ibid: supp.6).

Thompson concluded this compelling piece of writing on a note of hope, and with a call for solidarity. He quoted his brother Frank Thompson writing about the spirit of the partisans in 1943. This spirit, he argued,

> "... walks abroad again, in full daylight, on Polish streets. It was present on the Budapest barricades, and today wrests with anarchy for the future of Hungary. Never was there a time when comrades of ours were in so great need of our solidarity, in the face of the blind resistance of Stalinism, the black passions of reaction. (Ibid: supp.7). 1

In their final editorial, Edward Thompson and John Saville made several suggestions as to how this solidarity could be shown. They addressed several demands to the British party, calling on it to dissociate itself from the action of the USSR, to demand the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary; to proclaim full support with the Polish Workers party and to call district congresses and a national congress in Britain, to discuss these shattering events. And, they concluded,

> "If these demands are not met, we urge all those who, like ourselves will dissociate themselves completely from the leadership of the British Communist Party, not to lose faith in Socialism, and to find ways of keeping together. We promise our readers that we will consult together with others about the early formation of a new Socialist journal. (Thompson and Saville, 1956c:2).

In focusing on the need to give solidarity to the Polish and Hungarian people, neither Edward Thompson nor John Saville nor indeed their allies in the Reasoner could take account of the effects of publishing this issue on their continued party membership. But as the Soviet troops put down the revolution, they resigned from the party that had suspended them.[2] Now,

1. See Edward Thompson (1978:94). Here, Thompson elaborates on the idea that 1956 was 'a year of hope'.

2. See the Times (15.11.56).

they and the third of the party's membership that resigned over the following year, were faced with the problem of discovering the meaning of a political commitment suddenly bereft of organisational expression.

The party leadership, through the summer of 1956, did not prove entirely impervious to pressure for change. From July to November, it did print some letters critical of itself and party policy, though hardly enough to constitute the 'opening up' that the Reasoner was seeking. Whilst it did not accede to the growing demand from party branches to hold a special congress on the significance of the Stalin era until December, it did decide to hold a special national congress in April 1957. It also extended the membership of the Commission on Inner Party Democracy to include some critics of democratic centralism, and promised to revise the party programme, The British Road to Socialism to ensure, in Pelling's words, 'that it contained safeguards against the infringement of democratic liberty and 'Socialist legality' '. (Pelling, 1975:171).

These safeguards were limited, and as we shall see, largely fruitless adjustments. This highly centralist leadership did not succumb to pressure from below, and vote for its own demise. Its various 'liberalising' proposals were designed merely to placate internal criticism[1] and, through November and December, to stem the growing number of resignations. From the Soviet invasion of Hungary, resignations were coming in quite fast. On October 27th one third of the staff of the Daily Worker resigned from their jobs in protest at the editor's refusal to publish Peter Fryer's

1. The November 1950 issue of Woman Today, the CP's women's magazine, was a particularly good example of the CP leadership's attempt to play down the significance of the Hungarian revolution. It featured an article by Nora Jeffry, the first in a new series on 'How Socialism will Change our Lives', entitled 'The Vision Splendid', and four letters exchanged by the Rosenberg family before Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were executed for treason in the USA, more than three years before. Hungary was not mentioned.

dispatches from Hungary. And in November, a significant number of trade union leaders resigned from the party.[1] John Gollan himself admitted that 590 resignations had been received by early December, and that 7,000 people left over the whole of the year.[2]

Whilst John Saville and Edward Thompson resigned in mid-November, some critical members waited to see the outcome of the 25th congress before resigning. Several of them took their criticisms of the party leadership outside the party when they were denied a voice in the party press. On November 17th, the New Statesman printed a letter by Ron Meek, an economist and past defender of Stalin's policies,[3] and others, that condemned the use of Soviet troops in Hungary. One week later, the New Statesman printed a letter from Peter Fryer, in which he denounced the editorial policy of the Daily Worker in no uncertain terms. He described how

> "From start to finish the Daily Worker - or rather the Stalinists who control it - has lied, lied, lied about Hungary ...
>
> The Daily Worker cynically declares that for the Soviet Union to have 'refused ' to intervene would have been 'inhuman' and that by denying this I am 'quite oblivious to reality'. After what I saw of the bravery, the sufferings and the sacrifices of the heroic people in the face of terrible odds, this insult to their gallantry and to their 20,000 dead sickens me. Shame on a newspaper which can spit on a nation's anguish and grief. Shame on party leaders who can justify with smooth cliches and lies the massacre and martyrdom of a proud and indomitable people. These leaders are wholly discredited; they have abandoned Socialist principles; they are destroying the Communist Party as a political force. They must be removed, and removed quickly, if the Communist party is to hold its head up once more before the British people."
> (Fryer, NS and N 24.1.56:668).

1. See Pelling (1975:172-3)
2. From Wersky (1978:311)
3. See Ronald Meek and George Houston (1953) for example.

Peter Fryer also wrote a book, The Hungarian Tragedy[1], and addressed public meetings, at which he gave an account of the Hungarian revolution that was diametrically opposed to that of the leadership. He was expelled from the party as a result. And both the New Statesman and Tribune printed a letter from a group of notable party intellectuals that the Daily Worker refused. Chimen Abramsky , Eric Hobsbawn, Hyman Levy, Paul Hogarth, Jack Lindsay, Christopher Hill, Victor Kiernan, Ronald Meek, Rodney Hilton, Doris Lessing and others signed critical statements:

> "We feel that the uncritical support given by the Executive Committee of the Communist Party to Soviet action in Hungary is the undesirable culmination of years of distortion of fact, and failure by British Communists to think out political problems for themselves. We had hoped that the revelations made at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union would have made our leadership and press realise that Marxist ideas will only be acceptable in the British Labour movement if they arise from the truth about the world we live in.
>
> The exposure of grave crimes and abuses in the USSR, and the recent revolt of workers and intellectuals against the pseudo-Communist bureaucracies and police systems of Poland and Hungary, have shown that for the past twelve years we have based our political analysis on a false presentation of the facts - not on an out-of-date theory, for we still consider the Marxist method to be correct.
>
> If the left-wing Marxist trend in our Labour movement is to win support, as it must for the achievement of Socialism, this past must be utterly repudiated. This includes the repudiation of the latest outcome of this evil past, the Executive' Committee's underwriting of the current errors of Soviet policy." (Abramsky et al, NS and N, 1.12.56:701).

They were censured by the Communist party's political committee as a result.[2]

Party critics did invest some hope in the commission that had been set up to discuss democracy in the party - indeed, Christopher Hill, Malcolm MacEwen and Peter Cadogan were the latterly appointed members of this. The commission reported in December, but its members had failed to agree. Divided into the Majority Report that was written by the large number of

1. See Fryer (1956)
2. See Pelling (1975:175).

full-time officials on the commission, and that argued for relatively little change in party procedure, and the Minority Report, that was written by the party critics and that called for wide-reaching changes, it was the Majority Report that, predictably enough, was endorsed by the executive committee.[1] Despite a campaign to mobilise opposition at branch level, it was dutifully endorsed the following April by congress.

The leadership did not change

> "... they regard themselves as the Chosen People, the People of the Book, the personal custodians of a trust that is part of a great international movement ... They are timeless, and so they and their bodyguard must always be re-elected. ...
>
> ...even if the party membership were to be reduced to nought, they would still remain 'The Party'. It's soul would go marching on."

So wrote Hyman Levy, with bitterness (Levy, NS and N, 27.4.56:536). Levy who attempted to hold the banner of the departed membership inside the party, recounted too, in this letter to the New Statesman, that

> "During the past year, I have had innumerable letters, from members of twenty years standing and more, that would have wrung tears from a heart of stone - members who have turned grey with worry at what they regard as mental and moral degeneration."(Levy, NS and N, 27.4.56:536).

Many critical party members now found themselves prey to disillusion. Arnold Wesker gave this fictional expression in his play Chicken Soup with Barley.[2] In this quote, Ronnie, a communist from a Jewish CP family who had been politicised in the 1930s, is talking to his mother Sarah.

1. Pelling (1975:177). In the Minority Report, the case was made for an extension of discussion and accountability, and a genuinely united and disciplined party. See Communist Party (1957).

2. See Wesker (1960). This play was first performed on 7.6.60. It was the first of a trilogy, the other two plays being Roots, and I'm Talking About Jerusalem. They were all very popular amongst early new left supporters.

> "What has happened to all the comrades, Sarah? I even blush when I use that word. Comrade! Why do I blush? Why do I feel ashamed to use words like democracy and freedom and brotherhood? They don't have meaning any more. I have nothing to write about any more. Remember all that writing I did? I was going to be a great socialist writer. I can't make sense of a word, a simple word."(Wesker, 1960:72).

And later,

> "What's happened to us? Were we cheated or did we cheat ourselves? I just don't know, God in heaven, I just do not know!...(Collapses into armchair). And the terrifying thing is - I don't care either." (Ibid:73).

As we discover later in Wesker's trilogy of plays, Ronnie does still care. His was one of several temporary emotional responses to the crisis of 1956-7, one temporary halt before embarking on the longer term process of rescuing some political commitment from the debris of disillusion and the recognition of guilt. Members who left the party were to follow several different roads. Whilst many did disappear from active political life, some kept up their active work in the trade union movement, denuded now of the party membership that had always been something of a liability. Others became involved with Trotskyism. This was a very controversial thing to do. The CP was so fervently anti-Trotskyist that its supporters were seen as heretics to the cause. Peter Fryer was fairly prominent here. He applied for readmission to the CP at the 1957 congress, (he had been expelled for publishing The Hungarian Tragedy), but his application was refused.[1] He started up a fortnightly paper, the Newsletter, and was one of the founder members of the Socialist Labour League in 1959. This, like the CP, was organised on democratic centralist lines. And others, the subjects of this thesis, formed a 'new left' in which they hoped to learn from the bad, and further the good, of their old left past.

The extent to which party members were 'abused' before 1956 affected the nature and the publicness of their political involvement after they left

1. See DW (22.4.57)

the party. Christopher Hill, who had written several glowing defences of the Soviet Union under Stalin, could not but withdraw into a state of political ennui, a state that was coloured by his public recognition of his own implication in what had occurred.[1] Pelling cites Hill speaking at the 25th Congress where he had stated that

> "We have been living in a world of illusions. That is why the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Union and Hungary came as such a shock. We had not been prepared for these events by our leaders. We have lived in a snug little world of our own invention.
>
> Some of us, including myself, have a grave responsibility for having hushed up some of the things we knew."(Pelling, 1975:180).

And Edward Thompson told me how the opposite was true for himself - how, because he was less known as a defender of Stalinism, he could disentangle himself the more rapidly, and look for and indeed create new ways to be openly political.

There was one aspect of Soviet repression which new left characters maintained they knew nothing of:the persecution of Jews. Some prominent Jewish members of the British party had denied that Jews were being persecuted. Chimen Abramsky, a Jewish scholar of Russian origin, and an expert on Jewish affairs, and Hyman Levy, a physicist had both defended the Soviet record. It would appear however that Chimen Abramsky knew rather more than Hyman Levy.[2]

Hyman Levy was extremely shocked by Khrushchev's revelations of anti-semitism. (The Daily Worker carried a letter he wrote asking whether these revelations were true. The editor replied curtly that they were

1. See Hill (1947: 1948), and Hilton (1950) for example.

2. Chimen Abramsky was 'enormously well-informed by the Russians', and a 'totally committed Communist with no doubts at all', recalled John Saville (interview). John Saville, Raphael Samuel (Abramsky's nephew) and many others had complete trust in Abramsky's judgement. Hyman Levy's position is recounted in Wersky (1978:309-313).

'essentially correct').[1] Levy was so shaken that he could not let the matter rest. In the autumn of 1956, he travelled with other party delegates to the USSR to investigate the 'cult of the individual'. Levy was 'shaken to his foundations' by what he found out. He told the party congress in April that 'I got my belly full, enough to last me my life'.[2] He had found evidence of Soviet persecution so extreme that Soviet Jews had labelled the years between 1948 and 1952 as 'the black years'.

Levy's report to the 1957 congress was badly received. He had, to quote Saville,

> "... made an impassioned speech at the Congress attacking the leadership for having so misled the members of the Party about the real situation in the Soviet Union, (and) he was answered next morning by a speech of great vituperation, in which the parallel was made with the Bolshevik Party around 1905 who also lost many members: 'The Russians, too, were confused by the backboneless, spineless intellectuals who were turned in on their own emotions instead of using their capabilities for rallying the Party'." (Saville, 1976:16).

Hyman Levy was not suspended or expelled for this - and he did not resign. Instead, he mounted 'his own one-man opposition and struggle within the party'.(Widgery, 1978:311). And 'for nearly a year after the congress, Levy attempted to use every means at his disposal to stimulate a more open and exhaustive intra-party debate'. (ibid:311). Early in 1958, he published a book, Jews and the National Question, which he knew would result in his expulsion. This book contained a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between centralism, repression and persecution. It was also a personal statement of how he came to support the USSR - and why he still saw himself as a friend of the great 'experimenter' in socialism. It was Hyman Levy's attempt to 'come clean' with this painful past. (He had been a party member for 25 years).

1. See DW (30.8.56)
2. Levy quoted in Pelling (1975:179).

Levy really did not want to leave the CP. '... if only the party were prepared to offer a few public apologies', Gary Wersky recounts,[1] Levy would have sought re-admission. That he so thoroughly burnt his bridges is testament to his anguish, anguish that was witnessed at one of the early, historic meetings of London Universities and Left Review club. Stanley Mitchell recalled how Levy confessed:

> "I'm saying things now I'm not supposed to be saying, but I must say them, I can't keep them back. I know that as a result of this I shall be expelled from the party but let them expell me. they will expell me tomorrow." [2] (Mitchell, interview).

Stanley Mitchell went on to recount how Levy was then stood on trial. He came in for much acrimony at this meeting both from people who challenged him on past silence, and from people who still maintained that the Soviet Union should be defended through thick and thin. (Though he did publish the odd article in socialist journals in subsequent years, Levy was 'about to be condemned to the political wilderness' (Wersky, 1978:313), till he died in 1975).

Edward Thompson and John Saville were true to their promise to publish a new socialist journal, and the first issue of the New Reasoner appeared in the summer of 1957. In the intervening few months, the realisation of the significance of 'Hungary' had taken them a long way from their earlier position, in the Reasoner, of arguing for more discussion, for revision, for creative thought. With the Soviet invasion of Hungary, 'we were all in the same sick situation of apologising for a basic and profound authoritarianism', (Edward Thompson, interview) a situation that led them to resign from the party, and to realise the 'mendacity, brutality, dogmatism, authoritarianism'; [3] of Stalinist repression. But as they looked, with relief, at the 'old Adam of a critical, sceptical intelligence'[4]; as they

1. Levy quoted in Pelling (1975:179).
2. The title of Levy's talk was 'The Jewish Question'. It took place on 24.3.58.
3. Edward Thompson (interview)
4. Edward Thompson (1973:2).

revived 'all sorts of areas which had gone dark and obscure',[1] the party leadership resorted to its belief in the primacy of industrial campaigning. On the eve of his resignation from the party, Edward Thompson recalled this exchange with James Klugman, a party official:

> "We walked across Trafalgar Square, all the pigeons going up, and James said 'You and your people have made a great impact on the CP. You have destroyed a great deal of our work, and we are losing an immense number of members. 'But' he said, 'you intellectuals', (and he was a hell of an intellectual himself) 'you intellectuals will never build an industrial base. As long as we can keep hold of a few good cadres in the basic industries in Britain, in the mines and elsewhere, only 5,000, we shall outlast you, we shall come back!." (Edward Thompson, interview).

1. Edward Thompson (interview)

# CHAPTER 6

## DISCOVERING COMMITMENT: '1956', THE STUDENT LEFT AT OXFORD, AND THE FOUNDING OF THE UNIVERSITIES AND LEFT REVIEW

Through the cold war years, the left at Oxford university reflected the divisions of the left at large. From 1945, the socialist club had been a discussion forum for both Labour Party and Communist Party supporters, but in 1947 these two groups split.[1] The labour club (holding meetings that were addressed by Labour Party figures and trade union leaders) and the socialist club (that offered a broader programme under Communist Party control) became the two public forums of the Oxford left. (There were very few Trotskyists at Oxford at this time). The labour club executive (a group of around 25) organised the labour club meetings, and behind them, there was a smaller Labour Party group, for Labour Party members, that discussed issues raised by labour politics. Behind the socialist club was the communist club which, in the early 1950s, became a small CP branch. (This had a fluctuating membership of around eight men and four women). Both the labour club and the socialist club published journals - Clarion and Oxford Left respectively - which reflected the concerns of the organisers of these two groups. Oxford Left was in many ways the more interesting both in presenting the policies and campaigns of the Communist Party to non-party members, and in including some creative writing and criticism. Clarion tended merely to follow Labour Party policy.

Through the early 1950s, Oxford Left made repeated attempts to amalgamate with Clarion, without success. In the words of Gabriel Pearson, who was a member of the Oxford University branch of the CP,

1. See Howard (1954) for a brief history of the left at Oxford university.

> "One thing that the CP always tried to do, partly as a matter of policy, and partly as a matter of instinct, and partly out of desperate isolation, was to try to find some kind of alliance, some kind of axis, by which you could actually join up with other people." (Interview)

And whilst Clarion never did agree to a merger, (and whilst the labour club apparently proscribed CP members), Communist and Labour Party members, as we have seen, did succeed in working together in the H bomb campaign committee. This organisational co-operation never reached beyong this single issue campaign. Anthony Howard, writing in the Michelmas issue of Clarion, gave the 'theoretical dogmatism' of Oxford Left as the reason for Clarion's refusal to merge,[1] a reason that deserves some consideration given the very constraining intellectual atmosphere that dominated Oxford at this time.

Communist club members did not remember being completely dogmatic. Stanley Mitchell, a member of the communist club in the early 1950s, maintained that party members did have the inner freedom and flexibility to debate party philosophy and strategy, even though the 'last word' was always drawn from Stalin or Lenin or Marx.[2] But their debates did not lead them very far from orthodox terrain. 'There were peripheral criticisms of the Soviet Union, but not central ones' he recalled (interview), for they too were infected by the 'siege mentality' of having to defend the Soviet Union from attack. Indeed, Gabriel Pearson, another Oxford CP member, argued that the basic reason they were in the CP was to defend the USSR. Whilst people from other generations 'were in contact with energies that were flowing from earlier periods', his comrades at Oxford were not.[3] They defended democratic centralism, and revered Stalin. (The branch gave Raphael Samuel Stalin's Collected Works on his birthday,

1. See Howard (1954)
2. Stanley Mitchell (interview)
3. Gabriel Pearson (interview)

and some members even went so far as to wear black ties when Stalin died). They accepted the trials of 'traitors' in East Europe too, and even held one of their own.

Whilst these student members did not upset dogmatism in the party, they did challenge the dogmatism that surrounded them. They attempted both to radicalise the syllabus and to democratise the university. This was an uphill struggle: there were very few marxists in the university's employment, Marx hardly appeared on course syllabuses, and the question of the relation between politics and intellectual life had no legitimate place at all. They were faced, Gabriel Pearson recalled, with the dominance of the avowedly apolitical analytic philosophy school. This school, he maintained, perpetrated a 'mental terrorism' on philosophy students, (not a few of whom found themselves in the local mental hospital).

> "It was not of course an ideology ... but it was ideological, and it was through this that certain kinds of cold war politics were indirectly mediated, but still very potently ... It really was a terrorism. As I look back on this, I am astonished to think how coherent and monolithic in many ways the whole intellectual structure of the time was ...
>
> It did seem to me that anybody who was a communist was very, very embattled, and anybody who wasn't a communist, but who was a marxist, or who was trying to think his way and politicise his way outside the parameters of the cold war, felt himself to be, and was felt to by others to be in a very equivocal position." (Gabriel Pearson, interview).

They were also very alone.

Communist club members were restricted in their attempt to radicalise the Oxford syllabus by the economistic marxism of the cold war years. The range of accessible marxist writing was limited. The young Marx had not been translated, nor had Gramsci; and only one work of Lukacs was available

in English[1]. Nonetheless, some graduate students at Oxford did achieve a sense of livelier traditions elsewhere. Charles Taylor and Stanley Mitchell were students of foreign theorists - Charles Taylor studied French existenitalist writers, and was interested in Hegel, and Stanley Mitchell studied Lukacs. But the promise of these other traditions could never be realised in a university where the 'unorthodox' was subjected to suspicious repression.

Oxford university, then more than today, was a male-dominated institution. Women students were outnumbered by men by eight to one. In addition, men were often two or three years older because of conscription. As Hannah Mitchell, a student at Oxford in the mid 1950s, and a member of the socialist club recalled.

> "It was a disastrous period to be a woman student. If you couldn't compete intellectually you would hope that you would be decorative." (Hannah Mitchell, interview).

Women felt particularly disadvantaged in political meetings, where

> "... there was a terrific sense of distance between the males who were the producers of ideas, the producers of knowledge, and one's own pathetically passive role. I remember getting to feel quite self-conscious because if it wasn't a question of shyness about making a contribution ... it was a question of not being in the same mental universe of understanding." (Hannah Mitchell, interview).

She could only recall one other woman who went along to socialist club meetings at the same time as herself.

1. Edith Bone, Lukacs' translator, had disappeared in 1948, only to emerge in 1956 after spending eight years in solitary confinement. Lukacs himself was placed 'under restraint' in Rumania after participating in Nagy's Government in Hungary. See ULR 1:2).

   Lawrence and Wishart, the CP's publishing house, did not publish any translations of Gramsci till 1957, when The Modern Prince and Other Writings came out.

In late 1955 and 1956, left-wing students did eventually succeed in making some common ground, in the socialist club. There, marxism, Labour Party revisionism, imperialism and colonialism, and indeed the relation of culture to politics were debated, and members even discussed the possibility of starting a new socialist journal with students elsewhere. Alan Hall (a classicist) and Stuart Hall (a black Rhodes Scholar from the West Indies who was studying Henry James) were the prime movers here, and had begun preparing a book that would further these socialist club discussions.[1]

Autumn 1956 was a tumultuous time for socialists everywhere. The Soviet invasion of Hungary, which had surprised even CP members, took place as British and French troops were entering Suez. The CP's analysis of Britain as an imperialist aggressor was being confirmed at the very time when the USSR was resorting to force to maintain its sphere of influence intact. 'The Suez Adventure', as its supporters named the Suez invasion, added a final irony to the CP view: it may have been wrong about communist democracy, but it was right about capitalist imperialism. In fact, Suez was so naked an act of imperialist aggression that it politicised a generation.

The Suez crisis had been brewing for some months. From late July onwards, when Nasser, EgyPt's president nationalised the Suez canal, relations between the British, French, US and Egyptian Governments grew increasingly tense. British and French troops were amassed in the Mediterranean, whilst those states that used the Suez canal (excluding Egypt) worked out an 'international' settlement of their own. Right through the summer, Nasser,

1. See Holden (1976:148-150).

Egypt's president, was threatened with military reprisal, and right through the summer Nasser attempted to assure his potential aggressors that free and fair passage through the canal would be guaranteed.[1]

The autumn term at Oxford opened with Oxford Left, the socialist club journal appealing for no war over Suez. War there was. The British government legitimated military intervention on the grounds that it owned the canal. (It had bought 45% of the shares in 1869). Nasser meanwhile claimed that he was provoked into nationalising the canal when USA and Britain withdrew their promise to finance the building of the Aswan Dam in which, when completed, would greatly increase Egypt's arable land. He intended to use the revenue from the canal to finance the dam himself. From this time on, Nasser was described as an untrustworthy and imperialist dictator, the 'Hitler of the Middle East', whose injury to the honour and interests of Britain could only be righted by force.

It was an Israeli attack on Egypt that gave the British and French Governments the occasion to order an attack themselves.[2] They called on Egypt and Israel

> "... to stop all warlike action by land, sea and air forthwith and to withdraw their military forces to a distance of ten miles from the canal." (Foot and Jones, 1957:16).

And if Egypt had not agreed to this ultimatum within twelve hours they threatened intervention. On October 31st they embarked on an undeclared war, bombing Egyptian military targets, and by November 3rd, the canal was blocked.

1. See Foot and Jones (1957) for an account of the Suez crisis, and the protest against armed intervention.

2. Both Britain and the USSR had sold arms to Egypt, though Britain coupled this with putting pressure on Egypt to become part of the Western system of defence. Nasser resisted this - he was afraid of Israeli aggression. The withdrawl of funds for the Aswan Dam was an economic reprisal for Nasser's resistance.

As.the British Goverrment justified these actions with assertions that were later proved groundless,[1] the United Nations showed that it could take speedy and firm action. In the face of the veto that Britain and France had used in the security council, Yugoslavia moved the 'uniting for peace' resolution that provided for an emergency meeting of the general assembly.[2] Other nations did not regard this presumption by Britain and France that they could act as 'world policemen' with equanimity. Plans were rapidly made for a UN security force, to be provided by the smaller states, that would be empowered to disentangle the (possibly larger) belligerents. Again, Britain and France attempted to forestall United Nations action by issuing a military command of their own. On 5th November 1956, when a ceasefire between Egypt and Israel was all but secured, and the very day when the formation of United Nations emergency force was approved in the UN, British and French troops were dropped around Port Said. In the next few hours, the British troops set Port Said alight. They left behind them more than 25,000 homeless, several thousands injured and unknown numbers of dead.

The British Government, in the belated recognition that it could be charged, in Britain,with embarking on an unnecessary attack, attempted to play down the extent of the destruction that its army had wrought. But graphic descriptions were carried in the British press and when, the following day, this invasion was re-inforced by a landing by sea, the Government revived the bogey of communist infiltration to justify such extensive action. In fact, the threat of Russian invasion to force a cease-fire played a part in stopping the war. On the evening of the 6th

1. See Foot and Jones (1957:27) for a list of these.

2. See Andrew Boyd (1962) for an account of United Nations action over Suez, especially pp.105-110.

November, pending confirmation that both Egypt and Israel would accept the UN emergency force, Eden, faced with opposition within Britain and with pressure from the USA and the UN, ordered a ceasefire from midnight. The UN emergency force moved in, and by April 1957 the canal was finally cleared.

Britain and France had been playing with fire: 'Gunboat dimplomacy' is no nation's exclusive right, and there are nations with different interests and bigger bombs. But whilst this attack on Egypt did illustrate that each nation's survival depends on negotiation with powers larger than itself, it had also destroyed France and Britain's credibility as worthy negotiators, and their special influence in the UN.[1] For they had, with false claims and jingoist ideology, embarked on an undeclared and unnecessary war. As protest mounted against the illegality and excessiveness of their action, they attempted to hide the effects of their war-making from the very people whose honour and interest had 'demanded' that others be killed, and when faced with an ignominious withdrawal and the intervention of the UN force, dishonestly asserted that they had intended that this be brought into being all along.

The unpopularity of this war in Britain was central to the early ceasefire. Once an attack had been made, the Labour Party launched a campaign of protest that was larger than any in post-war Britain, and remarkable in its intensity. But, the Labour Party had been slow to protest. Gaitskell had joined Eden in condemning Nasser for nationalising the canal company in July, and the party had gone into the long summer recess with no official policy on Suez. Whilst the official Labour Party relied on

1. See Boyd (1962:107).

international diplomacy to solve this crisis, there were many who, fearful that this might fail, campaigned to prevent a British war. As military preparations, and, with them, the growing threat of force, continued through the summer, labour supporters and others organised themselves into a Suez emergency committee to co-ordinate this campaign. In the hope that war could, indeed, be prevented they organised a rally in Trafalgar Square, and 7,000 came. Peace News was sure that war had at least been delayed.[1]

Only when the first bombs were dropped on Egyptian airfields did the official Labour Party take up this protest, and by now tens of thousands were prepared to come out onto the streets.

> "From factories, from offices, from colleges, from groups of neighbours who had made their streets into strongpoints of peace, deputations swarmed to lobby their MP's. Everywhere - at factory gates, pitheads, docksides, shopping centres - meetings were held, petitions signed, telegrams dispatched. Trade unions, at both national and local level, expressed the anger of the working-class. Here and there, calls for strike action were heard. The Party and the TUC set their faces against it, and political action, in the event, sufficed. If it had not, strikes there would certainly have been." (Foot and Jones, 1957:238).

The Government meanwhile was being subjected to a continual barrage of protest in the House of Commons. For the first time, Britain had gone to war without the support of the official opposition, and the opposition would not now comply. On November 4th, 30,000 people packed Trafalgar Square in protest, for the fear that this attack could escalate was real and desperate, and in the words of one protester, 'My God, we could be at war, we could be at war this week'.[2]

Oxford students joined with protests against the Suez war. Several hundred travelled up to the Trafalgar Square rally - an unprecedented number in these

1. See PN 14.9.56.
2. Marilyn Butler (interview)

'a-political' days. And as Soviet troops fired on the Hungarian revolution, student members resigned from the CP. Sometime in the next few days, (and against Raphael Samuel's initial resistance), the Oxford communist club wound itself up.[1]

The Suez crisis had woken up more than the Labour Party. This week in November was to mark a radical break in the political thinking of a generation. Made more radical by the crisis in communism that followed on the heels of the 20th congress of the CPSU in February, and more angry and urgent by the Soviet military supression of the Hungarian Revolution, this break generated a new left that would no longer be restricted within the orthodoxies of the past, and a peace movement that all could call their own.

## The Founding of the Universities and Left Review

> "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
> Mere anarchy is locsed upon the world,
> The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
> The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
> The best lack all conviction, while the worst
> Are full of passionate intensity."

With these words from Yeats, the Oxford Left, in a special issue, attempted to make some sense of these cataclysmic three weeks.[2] It called for a socialist response to both the British and the Soviet systems. Quite what this entailed was discussed in the socialist club through the winter of that year.

With the disbanding of the communist club, the socialist club became the forum for wide-ranging socialist discussion that neither labour nor communist supporters had been able to create alone. With the participation

1. Stanley Mitchell and Gabriel Pearson (interviews).
2. Oxford Left (1956). A non-Party Political Offering, quoting Yeats, The Second Coming.

of those on the left of the Labour Party, many of whom had been angered by the party's muted and uncertain response over Suez,[1] and of ex Communist Party members, driven to leave over Hungary, the internal politics of both the Labour and Communist Parties were left aside. Horizons were extended to include discussion of figures such as Bakunin and Trotsky, and of cultural questions that the orthodoxies of both left and right had neglected. 'It was a stunned and uncertain attempt at revising some stalinist presuppositions' recalled Hannah Mitchell (interview), one of the very few women who went along. Ex-Communist Party members brought their knowledge of Marx and Lenin and Stalin and of the British labour movement; non-communists such as Charles Taylor, shared his knowledge of existentialism, and Stuart Hall, an English literature graduate, furthered a whole range of cultural concerns.

It was in the socialist club that the idea of starting a new socialist journal took hold. With the forum of the socialist club to discuss the new journal's orientation, and with the politicisation of young people that Suez, in particular, was securing, the prospect of a new journal had considerable appeal. Stuart Hall raised the idea again with Raphael Samuel; Gabriel Pearson and Charles Taylor were drawn into the editorial team; Rod Prince was taken on to run the business side; and the process of starting a radically new socialist journal had begun.

Isaac Deutscher (Stalin and Trotsky's biographer) had a special place in the genesis of this new journal. As Gabriel Pearson recalled,

> "He was really the only figure who seemed to have the kind of authority to give a marxist account of what had happened in the Soviet Union, and who seemed to be 'inward' with it; who knew all about the trials; who was completely disabused and totally comprehending of the perversions of stalinism, but somebody whose marxist faith as it were remained apparently unshaken." (Gabriel Pearson, interview).

1. Marilyn Butler (interview).

The journal's editors visited Isaac Deutscher's house to talk about their proposed publication. Deutscher was rather baffled by the idea, and asked them to define what they intended to do. Deutscher, Charles Taylor recalled, had asked them whether their journal was a 'journal of marxist opinion'.

> "We were rather embarrassed at the discrepance, because some people were and some people weren't ... We were desperate to make a good impression, but at the same time we found we were fitting into none of the categories he could understand." (Charles Taylor, interview).

In the Spring of 1957, the first issue of Universities and Left Review found its way onto left-wing and student bookstalls, and to the many subscribers who had been won through their advertising campaign. (They had advertised in Tribune and the New Statesman, and had written to subscribers to the Reasoner). The journal's name was chosen in memory of the Left Review of the 1930s, whilst also showing its university origins. This 'modern' looking journal, 7" x 10" in size, around 74 pages in length, was an immediate success. The first print run of 2,000 was quickly exhausted, and a total of 8,000 copies of the first issue were sold in all.[1]

That Isaac Deutscher had difficulty categorising the Universities and Left Review should in fact have pleased the editors. In their first editorial, they expressed the hope that this journal would 'avoid the bankruptcy of labels and pigeon-holes', (Editorial, ULR 1:ii) providing not only a forum for different socialist traditions, but extending the horizons of socialist thought. 'Taking socialism at full stretch' was one phrase they used, (and Marx, and materialism were not mentioned once). They based their case on the inadequacy of the political orthodoxies of the post-war decade, and

1. Rod Prince (interview). See also ULR 2:76.

on the absence of any alternative socialist ground. Trapped between stalinism and the 'welfare state', British socialism had 'suffered moral and intellectual eclipse' (ibid:i). The very meaning of socialism had been slowly 'nibbled to death'. They hoped, in particular, to retrieve literature and art from the 'a-political limbo' to which they had been consigned. '... our feeling for the quality of life and the community in an industrial society' (ibid:ii) were, they maintained, essential to socialism.

Young intellectuals had a special place in the Universities and Left Review's project. The editors believed that their engagement could be won by a socialism that encompassed cultural and 'experiential' concerns. They were badly needed: to create a democratic and egalitarian socialism would call on the energies of 'more people of the highest intellectual capacity, than have ever been recruited to politics before in this country', (ibid:ii).

The Universities and Left Review did have considerable appeal. Young people in their thousands were inspired by a socialist politics that emphasised cultural themes.

The idea to create a Universities and Left Review club in London was Raphael Samuel's. Enthusiastic that the Universities and Left Review should not be merely a journal of ideas, he mooted the idea of meetings where contributors to the journal could discuss their writing, and later set about opening the partisan coffee house.[1] The first meeting of the club, advertised in Universities and Left Review 1, took the journals editors and supporters by surprise. Gabriel Pearson recounted how, after setting out fifty or so chairs,

1. See chapter 10.

"We looked out and saw there was this vast queue that was stretching all the way down Southampton Row, almost as far as Russell Square.

Here was this rather odd group from Oxford, all postgraduates but really very amateur in lots of ways, with no really developed sense of political organisation of any kind, suddenly confronted with this sort of movement, which had arisen, or appeared to have arisen, spontaneously to greet us." (Gabriel Pearson, interview).

(Nor could their organisation cope with this flood of popular support. Suzy Benghiat, who became very much involved in the new left, opened the hall and collected entrance money for four weeks, without anyone speaking to her at all!)[1]

The six hundred people who attended this meeting, and the steady audiences of two or three hundred who came over the next two years, were drawn together, Stanley Mitchell recalled, 'because they were dying for a place to discuss. They had felt starved of like-minded company for a long time'. (Stanley Mitchell, interview). But people did not necessarily see them as <u>educational</u> meetings. Sheila Benson, the secretary of the club, saw them in this way:

> "I thought they were an act of solidarity for the disaffected, and they were very much appreciated when they started ... Maybe they were educational in the sense of suggesting to people that there was a range of issues socialists should think about. But I really felt that dissidents from the Labour Party and the Communist Party thought 'thank God'. Here was a point of solidarity." (Sheila Benson, interview).

Universities and Left Review club meetings were of such importance to the people who came that they could be very highly charged. 'They were very electric meetings ... People came to get rid of emotions, to get rid of their feelings' recalled Stanley Mitchell (interview). A welcome venue for people in the left to purge themselves after living through such a

1. Suzy Benghiat (interview).

painful political time, these meetings also provided a space where re-thinking could begin. Attracting,in addition, many hundreds of people who were entirely new to any political activity, they were the first tangible sign of a new movement on the left.

At Universities and Left Review club meetings, the author of an article in the journal would speak about their ideas, to be questioned by people from the floor. A range of authors addressed these meetings, from Claude Bourdet, the editor of France Observateur,[1] and Raya Dunayevskaya, a Soviet dissident living in the USA;[2] Lindsay Anderson,[3] Doris Lessing,[4] G.D.H.Cole,[5] and Isaac Deutscher who, despite his confusion about the Universities and Left Review, agreed to write for the first issue, and to speak at the opening meeting of the club.[6] In addition to these large discussion meetings, the Universities and Left Review club set up study groups on a variety of themes. In the autumn of 1957, a town planning group, an education group, a labour movement history group and a group discussing the problems of colonial and ex-colonial countries all got off the ground. These groups met monthly, alternating with the more general discussions on contemporary capitalism. In the summer of 1958, an East European committee was set up to research the dissident movement there.

1. Claude Bourdet spoke on 'The French Left and Algeria' in London, Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester in November.

2. Raya Dunayerskaya spoke on 'Marxism and Freedom' on 26.10.59.

3. Lindsay Anderson spoke on 'Commitment in Criticism', with Peter de Francia, on 11.4.57; on 'New Statesman: Writing and Responsibility' on 31.3.58.

4. Doris Lessing spoke on 'The Novel and Contemporary British Society' on 23.5.57; on 'Crisis in Africa', with Peter Worsley, on 21.4.58.

5. G.D.H.Cole spoke on 'What is Happening to British Capitalism' on 27.6.57.

6. Issac Deutscher spoke on 'Rosa Luxemburg' on 2.2.59; 'Pasternak and the Russian Revolution' on 3.3.59.

Advertised in the New Statesman as well as in the Universities and Left Review, and the New Reasoner, these smaller meetings were open to Universities and Left Review club members, whilst the larger meetings were open to anyone who wished to come.

As this new interest in socialism gathered momentum, the Universities and Left Review club also organised meetings for other groups whose interests they shared, and facilitated meetings outside London. Examples here were a week-long discussion entitled 'Beyond the Welfare State', organised by the National Association of Labour Student Organisations, (NALSO) and sponsored by the New Reasoner, and a series of meetings in Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester, (and London), that were addressed by Claude Bourdet.[1] And club members were centrally involved in the other major movement that came into its own post-Suez: the movement for nuclear disarmament.

To meet this growth in activity, the Universities and Left Review office moved from Oxford to London;[2] the club elected a chairperson, secretary, treasurer and librarian, and it set up organisational meetings to plan club activities. These quickly became more diverse. Raphael Samuel won support for his scheme to open a coffee-house and meeting place in London, and further administrative positions and organisational meetings evolved. The Universities and Left Review club, drawing on the enthusiastic support of its members, was becoming a major commitment in a growing number of people's lives.

What kinds of people were drawn to the Universities and Left Review? Who were the 8,000 and more people who bought the journal, and the thousand or

1. The first (and largest) of these, in London, took place on 14.7.58.

2. Premises were found at 7 Carlisle Street, Soho. They were large enough, as we shall see, to house a coffee bar and a library.

so who attended the club? They were, firstly, '99.999%' middle class. Young teachers, students, social workers, civil servants, architects, artists: these were the categories of people to whom both the journal and the club appealed, and whom my respondents recalled.[1] Men were dominant, numerically and verbally, in the club discussions, but women were far from absent or unimportant; and whilst it was barely a multi-racial group, some black and coloured people did have a place there. These were the 'socialist intellectuals' to whom the journal spoke; socialists whose commitment was to understand, and to create, a 'whole way of life' beyond the alienations of class, or age, or race, and without the continual threat of nuclear war.

These young middle class people were drawn to socialist politics after a period when both the middle class and indeed the working class had been politically quiescent. We have seen how, from the end of the Second World War, political protest was constrained and contained by the division of the world into two hostile camps. Social, political and cultural life had been stifled to 'defend' Western interests against the 'communist threat'. Nonetheless, there had been some 'suppuration' beneath the surface. As cold war tension eased, critical writers and artists in particular won larger and larger audiences for their work.

John Osborne, Kingsley Amis, Lindsay Anderson,[2] Doris Lessing, were among the radical artists and writers who were achieving prominence through work that challenged both the 'intellectualism' of their professions, and the

1. All the people I interviewed maintained that the ULR club, and indeed the new left, was overwhelmingly middle class. I did not carry out a survey of club members or ULR readers, so this may be an exaggeration. It is significant nonetheless that this was how those close to the journal saw the movement of which they were part.

2. Lindsay Anderson's films included Wakefield Express (1953), Truck Conveyer (1954) and Thursday's Children (1955).

social realities of their day. This new wave of artists ('angry young men' as they were somewhat belittling called), rejected the cultural hegemony of the southern English middle class. At a time when in politics, in the media, in the arts, class difference let alone class oppression was at best not mentioned, and at worst, denied, they sought to refocus attention on the class nature of the society in which they lived. Highly critical of a political system that generated apathy not protest, complacency and not commitment, they sought to represent the lived experience of the working class.

Of the writers' work, John Osborne's Look Back in Anger[1] presented in a particularly bitter way the author's sense of the paucity of middle class life, and the injustices of class rule. Performed to capacity audiences from May 1956, John Osborne succeeded in giving some expression to the political anomie of the younger generation. Through his central character, Jimmy Porter, John Osborne presented a highly cynical view of British society. With 'The wrong people going hungry, the wrong people being loved, the wrong people dying!' (Osborne, 1957a:94), the humiliation and oppression of women (described here as the creation of women and a problem for men), was the only escape that Jimmy Porter could find.

> "I suppose people of our generation aren't able to die for good causes any longer. We had all that done for us, in the thirties and forties, when we were still kids. (In his familiar semi-serious mood). There aren't any good, brave causes left. If the big bang does come, and we all get killed off, it won't be in aid of the old-fashioned, grand design. It'll just be for the Brave New nothing-very-much-thank you. About as pointless and inglorious as stepping in front of a bus. No, there's nothing left for it, me boy, but to let yourself be butchered by the women. (Ibid:84-85).

That Jimmy Porter was not speaking literally was lost on the critics, who took his statement to imply that the younger generation, depending on

1. Osborne (1957a).

the critic's politics, were either outrageously critical of 'the British way', or lacked a proper sense of their own implication in the injustices of the world. But this was not John Osborne's message. His concern, in this and other work, was to protest at the way that even the most debased and criminal acts of the British government were made to look 'like cricket'[1] by government and media alike. He saw his writing as a platform for the way that people, despite the acts of governments, live and think and feel. He was interested not in the elitist culture of his day, but in ordinary people, their relationships, their hopes and fears, their language, their work, their pain, their expectations:

> "What moves them, brings them together, makes them speak out? Where is the weakness, the loneliness? Where are the things that are unrealised? Where is the strength? Experiment means asking questions, and these are the questions of socialism." (Osborne, 1957b:84).

He was among the first in his generation to give expression to a cultural humanism, a humanism that, opening up a range of questions about experience and injustice, was inherently socialist. It should be noted though that for all its openness to popular experience and aspiration, it was always male-defined. John Osborne for one appears to have been no more critical of his own sexism than was Jimmy Porter of his. And as John Osborne's sexism passed unchallenged, so too did the sexism in other writers' work. It was to take a later generation of women to make political their so deep-seated oppression.

Even given this blindness to women's oppression there were, in the mid-1950s, 'causes' in abundance. The problem for Jimmy Porter and his followers was, firstly, that in this highly conservative society, political and cultural causes did not command mass followings on the part of the

1. 'They Call it Cricket' was the title of a statement that John Osborne published in Declaration (Maschler, 1957).

labour movement or of the 'intellectual' and left-wing middle class, and secondly that they felt already so estranged from and disenamoured of the British political process that they could not envisage changing it from within.

Several intellectual socialists put pen to paper on their problem of political involvement in the early months of 1957. This debate was sparked off by Kingley Amis' Socialism and the Intellectuals , a pamphlet published in January 1957. Amis pondered here on the absence of any laudable place in socialist politics for the intellectual. Amis believed that the only trustworthy motives for being politically active were self-interested ones. The middle class intellectual (defined quite widely here to include teachers, civil servants, journalists, industrial scientists, librarians, G.P's, some clergy and creative writers and artists), could never have a self-interested cause to pursue. Relatively secure to live and work as intellectuals, and with nothing in particular to gain from political activity, they were distanced from political campaigns. Their political activism, in Amis' judgement, was romantic - when in times of struggle, they became 'inflamed' by interests and causes that were not their own - or limited, -when in times of political quiescence, like the 1950s, they adopted particular causes - or non-existent. And these causes, such as racial equality, or law reform, on issues such as divorce, homo-sexuality, were defined as non-political since they failed to command the immediate support of the labour movement.

Amis' depiction of the socialist intellectuals unavoidable detachment was countered by various statements arguing that intellectuals should commit themselves to socialism. Ideas as to how to do this varied, but the very assertion that the intellectual had an important place in socialist politics was new and stimulating following the demise of socialist thought

and culture in the years of the cold war. The Universities and Left Review took this debate on board. Edward Thompson wrote on this theme in the first issue and the second issue carried a symposium by various authors replying to both Amis' and Thompson's ideas.[1] These writers shared a belief in the need for a new, politically committed intelligentsia. After a long period when the intelligentsia had led a rather detached existence, these writers attempted to widen the definition of who an 'intellectual' was, and to give the intellectual a political role.

Edward Thompson's contribution to this debate introduced the theme that became the theoretical 'rallying cry' of this new wave of socialists - 'socialist humanism'. For Thompson, this promised the way forward both from Stalinism and from liberalism. Through socialist humanism, socialist values could again find their place in popular movements for change. Thompson gave young intellectuals an important role here. Rebelling, already,against the society of their day, they were well set to start making contact with 'people, in particular working-class people', (Thompson, 1957a:34). They could facilitate a 'two way flow of ideas and experience',and bring to an end the 'spiritual impoverishment' of the past decade. (Ibid:35).

Thompson did not spell out quite how this could be done, but he did say that it could not, for the time being, be achieved by 'joining anything'. Sharply aware of the bureaucratisation of the Labour and Communist parties he was all/too familiar with the way that the round of party work, and the dogma of a 'party line' have inhibited the very intellectual work that he saw as the key to socialist humanist advance.

1. See Thompson (1957a:1957b); Mervyn Jones (1957); Harold Silver (1957); Charles Taylor (1957a);Rodney Hilton (1957).

Other authors took Edward Thompson up on his conception of socialist humanism, and his attitude to party membership. Charles Taylor charged him with being too hasty to reaffirm what must still be communist humanism.[1] He argued that socialists had not yet purged their values in the light of communist history. Rodney Hilton (whom we met when he was in the CP), and Mervyn Jones, were both, now, members of the Labour Party. They argued that intellectuals were needed in the Labour Party to take the party beyond the 'Gas Board Socialism'[2] that bedevilled it. The question of whether or not socialists should join the Labour Party was much debated, and never resolved, over the next few years.

Edward Thompson responded to his critics by amending his statement on membership.[3] He argued now that party membership on its own would never close the 'gap between ideas and social energies' (Thompson 1957b:31) which he saw as the central problem of his day. And for Thompson, the development of ideas had to come first. He also restated his belief in the 'fundamental humanist content' of the communist tradition, and his faith in the new movements in the communist world. Thompson's readiness, here as in all his writing, to affirm his faith in the socialist potential of 'the people' was a readiness that other Universities and Left Review and New Reasoner writers shared. They were remarkably unselfconscious about declaring themselves to be political idealists, committed to a value-based socialism (in distinction to an 'economistic' or bureaucratic' one), to be built through developing the social, rather than the class consciousness of 'the people'.

1. See Taylor (1957a).

2. See Jones (1957 ).

3. Thompson (1957b).

The Universities and Left Review and the New Reasoner were not alone in taking up the theme of commitment. Several writers, artists, film-makers had already made this theme their own. They shared the awareness that humanism had been absent both from political ideology and from culture. Their common sensibilities were summarised by Stuart Hall in his review of Declaration, a collection of statements by these non-establishment writers and critics.[1] Stuart Hall described here how what was taken as British culture was hostile to the richness and the variety of community life. And, he went on:

> "It seems that we need new ways of looking at, new ways of speaking together about the deep, immobilising contradictions of our culture. They appear in every facet of the society, in our political and economic institutions of course: more significantly, in our ways of feeling and response, in the manners and postures of our moral life. They are beyond the language of politics - at least the language of the political pamphlet and the hustings. The apathy of our political life, the narrowness of our economic theories - these are themselves merely the signs and symbols of a deeper decay, which has eaten into our emotional fibre, and which is breaking down the inner resistance and vitality of our community. We have to learn to evaluate - as political facts in some broader sense - a tone, a style, a tempo, a mode of address, as well as the intentions and assumptions which these things mask. And here I believe we are at the heart of the matter. For surely there has never been a greater cleavage between the tone of our society, its manner and forms, and the gross realities. What happens to a society, rigidly class bound, which uses continaully the language of equality? What happens to an oligarchy which conceals itself behind the rhetoric of the popular democracy? What happens when larger numbers are trained each year for responsibility and participation, but where the sources of power and decision grow everyday more remote? All our energies are expended in creating and consuming a culture whose sole purpose is to cover up the realities of our social life." (Hall 1958a:86).

The Universities and Left Review's project was to overcome these divisions between 'politics' and 'culture', and within cultural life itself.[2] The

1. See Stuart Hall (1958a)

2. The issue of the political nature of art and art criticism was taken up at one of the stormier meetings of the ULR club, where the New Statesman was taken to task. This meeting was addressed by Lindsay Anderson, and took place on 31.3.58.

journal's authors saw all culture and critism as inherently political, and exposed the class bias and political interests of the establishment artists of their day. They believed that both artist and critic should declare their beliefs and intentions, and they did this themselves. And they gave 'culture' the broadest definition, taking in not just popular art, but everyday life. It was here that they found a special role for themselves as 'committed' artists, producing work that represented the richness, the warmth, and the dignity in ordinary people's lives. 'Our aim', wrote Lindsay Anderson of the 'Free Cinema' documentaries

> "... is first to look at Britain, with honesty and affection. To relish its eccentricities; attack its abuses; love its people. To use the cinema to express our allegiances, our rejections and our affiliations. This is our commitment ...
>
> I want to make people-ordinary people, not just Top People - feel their dignity and their importance, so they can act on these principles. Only on such principles can confident and healthy action be based." (Anderson, 1957b:52).

Humanism was very much the rallying cry of these new left artists. They called on their fellow artists and critics to take the first step of believing in the worth and potential and essential equality of all human beings, a first step from which their commitment to socialist art, and to political change, could grow. Doris Lessing made this case particularly well.[1] She called on the writer to be both responsible and responsive, rediscovering the qualities of warmth and compassion and love of people that socialism had forgotten, and that modern literature lacked. She saw this as a difficult and urgent task. Theirs was an age of great uncertainty:

> "All the great words like love, hate; life, death; loyalty, treachery; contain their opposite meanings and half a dozen shades of dubious implication," (Lessing, 1957:14).

1. Lessing (1957).

while people felt detached from the plight of people elsewhere. It was an age too when the cost of apathy could be the destruction of the world. Increasingly, these socialist writers were becoming aware of the danger of nuclear war. Doris Lessing described how the bomb, by threatening such total destruction, could unite us. In the face of this terrible evil, class or race or nationality of gender should divide us no more. 'The people is me', wrote Doris Lessing; in fact, 'the people' was us all.

# CHAPTER 7

## THE NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT MOVEMENT

The British invasion of Suez was so naked an act of aggression that it aroused many 'apolitical people' to some awareness of Britain as an imperialist power. Anger and indeed shame at the British government's military intervention moved many thousands to protest, protest that, as we have seen, did have some effect in securing this war's early end. Roused, once, to political protest, the politically inexperienced could be more easily roused again. On 18.4.57, Peace News carried the headline 'Public Opinion effective in stopping the Suez war can halt the H test' and although the H bomb tests were not actually stopped, several new and novel organisations were set up to try to do just that. It was from these organisations that the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) was formed.[1]

In February 1957, the National Council for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons Tests (NCANWT) was launched, with the goal of persuading the government to abandon Britain's H bomb testing programme, planned to begin in May of that year.[2] It quickly gathered momentum. In addition, some individuals were offering to do rather more than write letters and lobby MP's: they were offering to sail boats into the area of the Pacific that was to be sealed off for Britain's H bomb test. In April, another group, the Direct Action Committee Against Nuclear War (the DAC) was set up with the immediate purpose of offering support to these brave souls. One volunteer, Harold Steele, (a 63 year old chicken farmer)[3] did set off for the Pacific with the DAC's backing.

1. The dangers of nuclear testing were not widely known. Some US tests were 'open to the public'. (See for example the report in The Times 25.4.55). It is only very recently that the absence of any protection for British servicemen at the British tests is coming to light. (See for example the Guardian, 5.4.83).
2. See PN 15.2.57. This group came out of the Local Joint Committee for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons that had been set up in 1955 following the announcement that a British H bomb was to be produced.
3. From Divine (1978:124).

This varied agitation against Britain's forthcoming test was given further impetus by the publication of the defence white paper in April 1957.[1]

This paper caused something of a furore in the press by stating

> "It must be frankly recognised that there is at present no means of providing adequate protection for the people of this country against the consequencies of an attack with nuclear weapons. (Cmnd 124, 157:494).

This document went on to justify the development and stockpiling of nuclear weapons by Britain on the old grounds that the only safeguard against 'major aggression' was the capacity to retaliate with nuclear weapons, both British and American. In response to this paper, several county councils followed Coventry and abandoned their civil defence programmes.[2]

After Britain's first H bomb test in May, the NCANWT issued a press statement that chastised the government for acting

> "... in the face of the most widespread opposition in the country and against the repeated warnings of the most eminent and informed scientists ...
>
> The opportunity to take the moral leadership of the whole world has been rejected." 3

This idea that Britain should claim moral leadership was one that stayed with the nuclear disarmament movement: indeed, in the judgement of Richard Taylor and Colin Pritchard

> "... the case for moral leadership through unilateral renunciation was the argument, at once radical, emotive and chauvinistic, that went farthest in unifying the Campaign." (Taylor and Pritchard, 1980:55) 4

1. See Defence: Outline of Future Policy. (1957). Cmnd 124.
2. These included St. Pancras, London (see PN 22.6.57), and Staffordshire (see PN 26.7.57).
3. Quoted in PN 24.5.57.
4. Taylor and Pritchard explored the political and ideological dimensions of the nuclear disarmament movement. They collated the replies to over 400 questionnaires, and interviewed some of the leading figures in the movement's 'first wave'. It is an invaluable study of the composition and complexion of the early movement against nuclear weapons.

Explicable in the context of Britain's changing status from a colonial to a non-colonial power in the 1950s, and, of course, in the context of Britain's shameful intervention in Suez, this notion of Britain as a world power of status and influence and potentially as a force for good, had a remarkable potency in the early movement for nuclear disarmament.

The paradox of developing nuclear weapons for defence purposes was placed in sharper focus by the military strategist, Sir Stephen King-Hall. A retired naval officer and an avowed anti-communist, this establishment figure wrote various articles and a book, in which he argued for a policy of unarmed resistance in the nuclear age.[1] But it was Britain's testing programme that remained the immediate focus of this growing public disquiet on the whole issue of nuclear weapons policy. In August, some notable Labour Party figures established an anti-testing campaign within the Labour Party, and in September, a crowd of 4,000 people were drawn to a rally in Trafalgar Square, planned to mark 'the opening move in a campaign to get the Labour Party to renounce the manufacture of H bombs when it comes to power'.[2]

This goal - of converting the Labour Party - was one that the CND adopted when it was formed in the February of the following year. It was a goal that nearly broke the campaign when, after having been narrowly achieved, it was ruthlessly revoked. At the 1957 Labour Party conference, no less than 119 resolutions called for varied restrictions on weapons and weapons testing. But it was here that Bevan made his 'naked into the conference chamber' speech, and the conference rejected a resolution calling for unilateral disarmament. It approved, despite Bevan, a motion calling for the unilateral and unconditional suspension of tests.[3]

1. See King-Hall (1956), and PN 3.5.57; 24.5.57. He called for a Royal Commission to study unarmed resistance.

2. PN 22.9.57. The rally was held on September 20th.

3. See PN 11.10.57.

At the close of 1957, two disturbing events were to lend greater appeal to the nuclear disarmers' cause. The first of these was the successful launching of the Russian satellite in October 1957.[1] Its implication, that the Soviet Union could be gaining ground also in the nuclear arms race was a disturbing thought for all those people who believed Britain to be relatively secure under the West's nuclear arsenals. The second event was an accident at Windscale, a nuclear plant that produced (and still produces) plutonium for military use. This accident caused the contamination of the local countryside, and the wastage of many local products, including thousands of gallons of milk. This wastage could not but alert local people to the dangers of radioactivity - and hence of nuclear tests.[2] Also at the close of 1957, Sir Stephen King-Hall was joined by other notable characters who used their access to the media to dispute both the wisdom and the morality of nuclear weapons policy. The first of these was J.B. Priestley who, in an oft quoted article in the New Statesman, attacked the unaccountability of Western leaders in regard to their possession and control of nuclear weapons, and the apparent insensibility of the leaders themselves. In considering this state of affairs, J.B.Priestley gave voice to a growing current of feeling, the feeling that

> "... now that Britain has told the world she has the H-bomb she should announce as early as possible that she has done with it, that she proposes to reject, in all circumstances, nuclear warfare."(Priestley, 1957:555).

The New Statesman carried a further challenging statement on nuclear weapons by Bertrand Russell, the eminent philosopher. In an 'Open Letter to Eisenhower and Krushchev', two 'most Potent Sirs'(NS 23.11.57:683). Bertrand Russell pointed out that the interests that the USA and the USSR held in common were of far greater importance than the matters on which

1. See PN 18.10.57.
2. See PN 25.10.57.

they diverged. Depicting very eloquently both the danger of world destruction now that both East and West possessed nuclear weapons, and the inevitability of proliferation if the USA and the USSR did not disarm, Bertrand Russell maintained that he

> "... cannot but think that you would both rejoice if a way could be found to disperse the pall of fear which at present dims the hopes of mankind. Never before, since our remote ancestors descended from the trees, has there been valid reason for such fear. Never before has such a sense of futility blighted the visions of youth. Never before has there been reason to feel that the human race was travelling along a road ending only in a bottomless precipice. Individual death we must all face, but collective death has never, hitherto, been a grim possibility." (Russell, 1957:683).

The power to dispell this fear lay in the hands of Eisenhower and Krushchev, and Russell urged them to meet, to talk - and to agree. The replies - from Krushchev and Dulles[1] - did not bode well for disarmament. Whilst Krushchev maintained that the USSR had only developed nuclear weapons in order to defend itself against the ever growing arsenal of weapons controlled by the USA, Dulles proclaimed that the USA had reluctantly held onto weapons to protect themselves from the communist drive for 'world domination'. And whilst Krushchev matched Russell in the rhetoric of his support for 'peaceful co-existence' and negotiated disarmament, Dulles denounced every word that Krushchev had written. Clearly even Bertrand Russell could not overcome the US government's propensity to view every Soviet statement as inherently evil and deceitful nor the Soviet government's propensity to sound whiter than white.

In the face of such insuperable obstacles to negotiated disarmament, support was growing for Britain to take action alone. On 13.12.57, Peace News reported that 64 MP's had signed a motion protesting against the US H bomb patrols over Britain's skies, and an opinion poll published

1. See 'Nikita Krushchev Replies to Bertrand Russell', NS, 21.12.57:845-6 and 'Mr Dulles Replies to Russell and Krushchev', NS, 8.2.58:158-9.

in the News Chronicle found that they had the majority of the public behind them.[1] The National Campaign Against Nuclear Weapons' Testing, though it had failed to halt the tests, voted to extend its campaign, favouring, in December 1957

> "a campaign against the manufacture of the H bomb with unilateral action by Britain if international agreement is not forthcoming."[2]

1958 was to mark the beginning of a new campaign to 'end the H bomb threat' - with style. Kingsley Martin, the editor of the New Statesman, had convened a group of NCANWT sponsors and others, in response to the massive number of letters that had been sent to the journal following J.B.Priestley's article. In January 1958, they met with Peggy Duff[3] (a seasoned campaigner on a number of issues) and Canon John Collins to discuss the broadening of the anti-tests campaign. Many of those present were noted public figures: Bertrand Russell, Donald Soper, J.B.Priestley, and others attended this gathering, and elected themselves onto the executive of the new Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (the CND). Their aim was to wage 'a sharp, virile and successful campaign to rid Britain of dependence upon nuclear weapons, if need be by unilateral action'.[4]

With the growing concern at nuclear weapons testing, at the US aircraft patrols over Britain's skies, with the dangers of nuclear proliferation, this new organisation was bound to provoke a massive public response. The CND executive were well aware of this, taking the precaution of booking three additional halls for the CND's inaugural meeting which, in the event, over 5,000 people attended.[5] On that remarkable occasion on the

1. See PN 20.12.57. On 27.1.56, PN had carried the startling revelation that US aircraft loaded with atom bombs patrolled the skies of Britain, day and night. PN had come across this story in the US magazine Town Journal. It was not to be found in other newspapers for another eighteen months.
2. See PN 13.12.57.
3. See Duff (1971) for a political biography.
4. Canon Collins, reported in PN 7.2.58:1 .
5. See PN 7.2.58:12, and PN 21.2.58.

17th of February 1958,

> "Speaker after distinguished speaker in the Central Hall hammered home the purpose of the campaign: Britain must renounce the Bomb. In the name of Christianity (Canon Collins); in the name of common humanity (J.B.Priestley); in the name of security (Sir Stephen King-Hall); in the name of survival (Earl Russell); in the name of morality (A.J.P.Taylor); in the name of sanity (Michael Foot) Britain must abandon her policy of massive retaliation and lead the world back to the way of peace and progress". (PN, 21.2.58:1).

An unconditional unilateralism was the goal of that enthusiastic gathering, and the following day the executive made the will of that first meeting the campaign's official aim.

As the CND's executive looked to strengthening the campaign by 'influencing the influential', CND's young and numerous supporters took the cause of nuclear disarmament onto the streets. Spontaneous protests followed the CND's inaugural meeting. Several hundred people went and sat down in Downing Street and some were arrested.[1] This action forboded the differences between the leadership and the membership that were a feature of the nuclear disarmament movement from its very inception.

The CND's executive was a group of self-appointed and middle aged people, mainly men, most of whom had been involved with campaigning before.[2] They envisaged the CND waging a short and intensive campaign, quickly achieving its ends by pursuing a direct line of influence with people in power.[3] Their optimism, and their elitism, precluded any need for a democratic structure within the campaign itself. Instead, they saw it as <u>their</u> campaign,

1. See Taylor and Pritchard (1980:7).

2. The CND's first executive comprised Canon Collins (chairman) Richie Calder (vice-chairman), James Cameron, Harold Davies, Michael Foot, Arthur Goss, Kinsley Martin, J.B.Priestley, Prof. J.Rotblat, Sheila Jones, and Peggy Duff (organising secretary). (From Driver, 1964:43).

3. See Exley (1959:162-170) and Taylor and Pritchard (1980:7, 57).

which people were free to support, but powerless to control. In short, they saw themselves as the leaders and not the representatives, of the growing movement for nuclear disarmament. And they were leaders who had little use for the growing movement. Perhaps they saw it as giving them extra credence in their appeals to powerful people. They certainly did not welcome any challenge to their own authority, or any less 'respectable' ideas about how nuclear disarmament could be achieved.

In practice, the executive's distance from the membership worked two ways. It enabled the CND movement to remain relatively autonomous of control from above. Soon after the campaign's inception, supporters had set up local groups in their own home towns (some of which did adopt membership systems and democratic structures), with time, these linked to form regional organisations. In addition, and with the executive's blessing, national groups were formed within the CND. A women's group; a youth group; a combined universities CND; and exhibitions group; a film group; an architects' group were all examples here.[1] There was some co-ordination between these groups and the executive: a formal co-ordinating committee was set up for this, but there was no clearly defined structure for accountability or control.[2]

Over the first few months of its life, the CND engaged in a variety of activities. Supporters held meetings, organised petitions, wrote letters. But it was the first Aldermaston March, held at Easter 1958, that finally established the CND as a part of British political life. The idea of a four day march from London to Aldermaston actually came from the Direct Action Committee Against Nuclear War, which had set up a sub-committe to

1. It is interesting that the CND had a separate women's group given the great importance of women to the genesis of the CND. It is curious too that the structure of the women's group mirrored the structure of the executive on which they were so noticeably under-represented.

2. See Exley (1959:162-168) for an account of how the executive ensured that its will prevailed. The CND executive did submit to democratic pressure with time.

plan out the idea before the CND was formed.[1] With a massive publicity drive - organised and undertaken by supporters of Universities and Left Review club - and much organisation, this first Aldermaston March was an enormous success. It was ritualistically repeated every year.

4,000 people - a large political gathering at that time - left Trafalgar Square, with a prayer, on Good Friday, and after several hundred had marched through some of the worst Easter weather on record, 5,000 marched in silence into Aldermaston four days later. These marchers saw themselves as making a personal stand against the inhumanity of nuclear weapons.

> "I felt that by marching for four days through all the Country districts one was actually declaring a value-system"

recalled one ex-marcher, Leone Gold (interview), expressing a sentiment that Raymond Williams characterised as being shared by the movement as a whole.

> "That was the instinct of the simple call for unilateral disarmament: to establish a human choice where no fully supportable political choice existed." (Williams, 1968:89).

They were not easily categorised among the ranks of the political.

> "Young people, old people, students, working people, pacificists, socialists, Christians, anarchists, ex-Communists, people without politics, and a few Communists.
>
> Girls in pony tails and boys in jeans, Members of Parliament, skifflers and jazz enthusiasts, old men and old women, young couples with their children, determined to help save mankind. And more young people." (Gene Sharp, PN 11.4.58:1)

This was the Peace News correspondent's description.

The marchers were a motley crew who, as often as not, saw themselves as moral as much as, if not more than, political actors, and felt the more committed as a result.[2]

1. PN 3.1.58.
2. See Taylor and Pritchard (1980) for a discussion of this.

> "As the steps lengthened into miles, the conviction seemed to grow in them: 'This is it'. The struggle against the supreme inhumanity of nuclear weapons was great enough to become a focusing point for commitment, something great enough to deserve their full support." (Gene Sharp, PN 11:4:58:8).

A diverse gathering of young and old, this march

> "... seemed the sign of an awakening from apathy. The sense of liberation - liberation from the feeling that individuals are coming to count for less and less in the shaping and direction of society - appeared to be expressing itself not only in an intellectual renunciation of nuclear weapons, but also in the whole attitude of personal commitment to politics. Many of the marchers were aware that professional politicians would regard their action as ineffective. These 'people with a purpose ... seemed to know no more than that they had to do something'." (Exley, 1959:132) 1

The depicting of this march as a march of the previously 'a-political' clearly pleased the organisers, they hoped to maintain an image of CND supporters as 'ordinary' people in the months to come. One ex-marcher recalled that every one was asked

> "to look as normal as possible. This meant that the men were asked if they could possibly be tidy in their dress and preferably not bearded ... I went along with shoes with a little heel, and my ordinary mac and was congratulated. 'We want someone who looks as though she is just walking along the pavement you see, not even anoraks'." (Marilyn Butler, interview).

It should be added though that this concern with image was addressed as much at CND's own 'bearded weirdies' as anyone.

After this first successful Aldermaston march, a division of activity was, in effect, established between the CND and the DAC. Whilst the CND executive had to resign itself to constitutional 'street politics', the DAC went on to organise various direct action demonstrations, beyond the reach of the CND executive's disapproval. But their protests did not and perhaps could not have taken place without help from local CND supporters.

1. Exley is quoting from the Manchester Guardian, 7.4.58.

DAC activity was, typically, locally based, intensive and sometimes of quite long duration. It was initiated by the DAC team, (another self-appointed body) informing the 2,000 people on its mailing list of future plans. Those people would then prepare the ground for the DAC activity, drawing, where possible on local CND support. They did organise some larger scale activities too, such as a march on London, on 22nd June, 1958, and the protest at Holy Loch, in Scotland, when Polaris was being installed, in May 1961.[1] Whilst the CND was novel for the size of its support, it was the DAC which shifted the political activism in Britain onto entirely new ground. To raise public awareness of nuclear weapons policy, the DAC staged a series of protests at Aldermaston, where nuclear weapons were researched, and at the various places where US missiles were due to be installed. At Aldermaston, the DAC organised an eight week picket; at North Pickenham demonstrators attempted to block the entrance; at Swaffham demonstrators climbed over the perimeter fence; they non-violently resisted arrest. The novelty and drama of these actions, and the fact that 22 protesters were in prison over Christmas 1958, earned the DAC wide publicity (something that continually eluded the CND). As a result of their actions, more people were at least aware that missile bases were being built.

There can be no doubt as to the DAC activists commitment to do everything in their power, short of acts of violence, to achieve disarmament. They firmly believed that the goal of a disarmed and peaceful society could only be created peacefully. The paradox that their non-violence may provoke others to use violence against them did not deter them, not least because it forced into the open the violent nature of Britain's 'military state'.[2]

1. The CND also organised a large scale protest on the heels of the first Aldermaston march. It held a mass lobby of Parliament that 9,500 people attended. This took place on 20.5.58.
2. See April Carter (1970) and Alan Lovell (1959) for discussion of the philosophy of direct action.

We have already seen how the nuclear disarmament movement described itself as a moral movement; how the movement's supporters saw themselves as moral more than political actors; how both the CND and DAC executives expressed their rejection of nuclear weapons policy in moral terms. For the CND, this moral slant was not without political benefits: it could help maintain the unity of a campaign in which quite a range of political differences could be found; it could win the campaign varied, and numerous supporters; and it promised to heighten the appeal of the CND with the Labour Party.[1]

The goal of converting the Labour Party had much support within the CND.[2] People differed over how the Labour Party should be converted: the executive looked to the party leaders; the movement to the rank and file. The cause of nuclear disarmament was becoming increasingly popular both in the Labour Party and in the labour movement too. But the CND leadership and the Labour Party rank and file saw unilateralism rather differently. Whilst the leadership tended to avoid making any connections between the demand for nuclear disarmament and other political issues, rank and file unilateralists were typically on the left of the party. It was on the issue of nuclear disarmament, in 1960, that the struggle for power between left and right in the party was waged.

The goal of converting the Labour Party was never one that the DAC shared. Indeed, in the 1959 election, the DAC advocated a 'Voters' Veto', in which voters were to abstain if no nuclear disarmament candidate was standing in their constituency. The CND rejected this line: it feared that it could

1. Taylor and Pritchard found that over the period 1958-1965 53% of its CND respondents were members of the Labour Party, 8% were young socialists, 9% were members of the Communist Party, 5% were members of the Liberal Party, and 6% belonged to the new left clubs. 1% were members of the Conservative Party. See Taylor and Pritchard (1980:150-151; 54).

2. In the autumn of 1958, the executive of the CND set up a Labour advisory committee. See Taylor and Pritchard (1980:155).

ruin the CND's relationship with the Labour Party, whilst risking the return of a Conservative Government that could never be won over to the unilateralist cause.[1]

The DAC, which was attempting to force the whole question of nuclear weapons policy into the open, saw the CND's strategy of converting the Labour Party as dangerous and misconceived. It feared that it would lay the nuclear disarmament movement open to compromise and wastage, boding the movement's ruin. The DAC were on quite strong ground here. Quite apart from the amount of work involved in achieving a unilateralist Labour Party, there could be no guarantee that a Labour Government would be any more open about nuclear weapons policy than its predecessors. Any Government, the DAC argued, would have to be <u>forced</u> to adopt unilateralist policies, forced by genuinely unilateralist MP's in Parliament, and by pressure from a unilateralist public.

The relationship between the nuclear disarmament movement and the Labour Party is one to which I shall return. First, I shall look at what was <u>new</u> about the movement for nuclear disarmament; at how it broke away from conventional politics in its thinking, its organisation, its activities, and in its support.

The nuclear disarmament movement's definition of itself as both moral and political sheds some light on its appeal. A predominantly middle class movement of women, men, many young people and some old,[2] the CND attracted those people who felt government policy to be so dangerous that it had to be opposed. With the knowledge that both the political parties and

1. This debate is discussed at some length in Exley (1959:301-310).

2. In Taylor and Pritchard's sample, 90% were middle class. This compared with 85% in Parkin's study. See Taylor and Pritchard (1980) and Parkin (1968).

the trade unions had failed to halt Britain's nuclear weapons policy, they were attracted to an autonomous movement that could remain independent in the face of pressure from above.

The claim that the bomb was a moral issue had one very beneficial effect: it freed the discussion of nuclear weapons policy from the narrow confines of political ideologies, of party loyalties, of factional disputes where, as we have seen, it had been trapped till now. The various strategic justifications for Britain's independent 'deterrent' and for NATO's arsenals were rendered illegitimate by the simple argument that the very existence of nuclear weapons was wrong: they endangered the survival of the world. Reliance on the fraught, complex, and unsuccessful policy of multilateralism was displaced by the demand that Britain take action alone. This shift - from the political to the moral; from a goal that was contingent on other nations, to a goal that could be achieved alone - gave the nuclear disarmament movement a very direct and immediate appeal.

In addition, <u>emotional</u> reasons for supporting nuclear disarmament were validated in the campaign. The DAC, in particular, integrated the emotional into an ideology of social change. Turning frequently to Gandhi, both for inspiration and for legitimation, the DAC developed a theory of non-violent resistance in which an emotional rejection of nuclear weapons, and indeed of war, played a central part.

Ideologically and organisationally, the first wave of the nuclear disarmament movement was very radical in its day. In opposing the production and the possession of nuclear weapons, it challenged the whole logic of militarism. It rejected the paradoxes of seeking to defend life by threatening to destroy it, and of eroding the quality of life in the name of its protection. And it asserted that these new weapons of mass destruction had so changed the nature of war that they rendered warfare out of date. On all these counts, the

nuclear disarmament movement owed much and offered much to women. To use a phrase of one women CND supporter, war had always been a 'male field of activity'. (Marilyn Butler, interview). Planned by male military planners, prepared for by male technologists, entered into by male heads of state, fought by male armies (and dreamed of by male children), war had disrupted and destroyed the lives of all people, young and old, male and female. The nuclear disarmament movement, in maintaining that militarism could be overcome, held a tremendous appeal for women and for the young. It promised security in a society where women's traditional concerns for peace, for their children's up-bringing, for the quality of life, would no longer be threatened by 'that terrible feeling of being totally opposed from above'. (Marilyn Butler, interview).

Organisationally too, the nuclear disarmament movement was attractive to the politically inexperienced. In deciding not to mirror the formal structures of established political groups but to rely, instead, on relatively autonomous campaigning by the very many local and national groups, the CND drew many thousands of people into active campaigning who had never been active before. In these groups, participants could choose to structure their meetings. Whether or not to discuss their planned activities through the proposing of motions, amendments and points of order; whether to introduce a system of voting procedures and voting rights were all up to them.

The openness of the CND was characteristic not only of its organisation but also of its activities. The marches - CND's main activity as far as the mass of its supporters were concerned - were accessible to everyone who could walk or be pushed, and who could arrange to leave immobile dependents behind. With people travelling as groups - as work groups, local groups, women's groups, school groups, social groups, trade-union

groups - to CND marches and walking together under their own special banners ('Soho Says No'; 'the Royal Court Against the Bomb'), and with many other people coming alone, with friends, with families, it was possible for a very wide range of people to feel that CND marches were their marches, and indeed that they were the CND. Marchers did discuss the nature of the march; the nature of the CND organisation; indeed one group apparently put out a leaflet entitled 'The March Must Decide' when the route was under debate.[1] The people I talked to remembered the Aldermaston marches in particular as very friendly and enjoyable occasions, which, despite the organisers' wishes to present an image of the CND as a movement of conventional people, actually helped to liberate people from the conventions of their day.

The DAC and the later Committee of 100, even more than the CND, promised a route to political influence that depended on no prior involvement in political life. Its philosophy was both simple and direct, shortcircuiting both liberal and socialist prescriptions on how to influence the state. The drawback though was that this philosophy was by no means easy to put into action. Activities were embarked on at considerable personal risk, as increasing numbers of protesters were arrested, running into thousands in the early 1960s. Clearly, DAC and Committee of 100 activism was out of the question for those responsible for dependent children and relatives. Neither the DAC nor the CND nor the Committee of 100 had any formal commitment to provide childcare for meetings, demonstrations, or indeed for terms in prison. On demonstrations that risked breaking the law, parents were understandably unwilling to bring their children along.

1. Rod Prince (interview).

Women were very involved in this movement for nuclear disarmament nonetheless. Indeed, they played a central part in creating a movement that was appealing to women, to young people, to the 'non-political', and their part deserves to be separately told. Separately for two reasons: firstly, women's part in all areas of social life where they work together with men is too easily lost in an account that is not gender-specific; and secondly because the ideology behind women's involvement related specifically to women as mothers or potential mothers. In other words, many women nuclear disarmers saw themselves as belonging to a separate group from the men.

## Women and the Nuclear Disarmament Movement

We have already seen how 1950s women peace campaigners claimed that women had a 'special relationship to peace'.[1] Skilled peace-makers in their daily lives women could be very effective campaigners for peace. The fact that women had been active in the pacificist movement for many years gave these feminists a specific point of reference. The pacificist movement did appreciate that women had special qualities as peace workers. (Peace News was one of the few political papers that did not assume the feminine 'she', 'her' etc. under the masculine 'he'). With the decision of the British government to manufacture and test the H bomb, the hopes of these 1950s feminists that far larger numbers of women, pacifist or no, would enter the political arena and campaign for peace were realised: very many women did become committed nuclear disarmers.[2]

Several women were very involved in initiating and co-ordinating the campaign against the tests that predated CND. In contrast to other political

1. See Ch. 3.

2. Taylor and Pritchard found that a higher proportion of women than men were 'absolute pacificists'. 45% of pacificists defined themselves as 'non-political'. See Taylor and Pritchard (1980:36).

groups, women were not massively outnumbered by men. One woman, Gertrude Fishwick, has been individually credited with starting the 'chain reaction which ended in CND'.[1] And for the many thousands of women who became involved, there were thousands more who feared and hated nuclear weapons.

Women activists in the National Campaign Against Nuclear Weapons Testing felt themselves to be specifically committed, as women, to the anti-tests cause, and organised protests specifically for women. On the first of these, a march in London on the 12th May 1957, 2,000 women, some in mourning and many wearing black sashes, marched in a 'dignified' silence to Trafalgar Square.[2] This march set a precedent for the protests that followed. Dubbed the 'Women in Black' marches, the women who came did tend to wear something in black, in mourning at the deaths that would occur from each new weapon test, and as a reminder of the threat of death that hung over us all.

The most prominent reason for women's concern over nuclear weapons testing was the harmful effects of the tests on children. It was as mothers and potential mothers that women were urged to protest - the NCANWT, in building for the first London women's march, had sent out a circular to women's organisations which stated very clearly that

> "In view of the special danger to children likely to result from the contamination of H bomb tests, the National Campaign is calling on women supporters to join us in a march of protest against H bomb tests." 3

The case that weapons testing was harmful to health, particularly the health of unborn generations, was also made in a CND pamphlet for women entitled Tomorrow's Children. Written by a number of women CND supporters,

1. See Driver (1964:31). Other key women included Sheila Jones, Ianthe Carswell, Kathleen Lonsdale, Peggy Duff.
2. PN 17.5.57.
3. PN 26.4.57.

this pamphlet presented 'horrible facts' with 'a special meaning for women'. It described how women, as mothers, would be helpless in the face of suffering, should nuclear war break out. And it assumed that women, as the givers of life, were especially committed to its continuation.[1]

Women in the CND also organised separate women's protests and meetings. By now, the effects on children of testing and the terrible threat to life of nuclear warfare were recognised as women's concerns. At a meeting of women in London (which c.800 women attended), the focus, again, was on women as mothers.[2]

Despite the obstacles of political inexperience and lack of confidence that many women had to overcome, women were very much in evidence, not only in the CND but also in the DAC. There were several women on the committee itself: April Carter, a young woman of 20, was the DAC's secretary; Pat Arrowsmith, a pacifist, was the field organiser for the first Aldermaston march; Sheila Jones, who had been an organiser for the NCANWT and Frances Edwards, 'an Oxford housewife'. Like the CND women, these women had not led typical lives.

> "The women who were most active in the DAC were all unconventional and all women without ties... the women who were actively involved weren't housewives or mothers in a normal sense and one can't have expected us to be." (April Carter, interview).

They were not, according to April Carter, consciously feminist. Relatively unaware of the problems that women faced in becoming active campaigners, and relatively uncritical of the ideologies of women's roles, these DAC women, so far as I know, did not create any separate space for women in the campaign. Nonetheless, women were involved. As with the CND, the

1. See CND (1958)
2. PN 4.7.58. This was held on 27.6.58.

ideology and the organisation of the DAC facilitated the involvement of women in the forefront of the campaign.

The Berlin crisis, in the autumn of 1961, generated an upsurge of anti-nuclear protest, especially from women. In America and Canada as well as in Britain, women's groups were spontaneously formed, drawing in women of all ages and from predominantly, though not exclusively, middle class backgrounds.[1] The fear of nuclear war that the Berlin crisis generated was exacerbated by the resumption of atmospheric testing - in October, the USSR detonated a particularly large H bomb. In November, about 600 women went with their children to the Russian and American embassies in a protest against testing, and a group called Women Against the Bomb was formed.[2]

Quite how concerned middle class mothers were about the dangers of nuclear weapons policy is evidenced particularly well by the massive responses to a women's peace petition launched by the Guardian at the end of October, and to a letter from a woman Guardian reader, Judith Cook, on November 6th. By the 8th December, one thousand readers had written in about the petition. And within four days, Judith Cook had received one thousand replies.[3]

Judith Cook described how she was feeling 'unhappy and hopeless'; how she was 'obsessed' with the nightmare of what could happen in the event of nuclear war. And, she concluded,

> " 'Standing firm', 'the values of the free world', 'our rights', are all meaningless slogans when balanced against children's lives. As well as dying for what is good in our way of life, we should also be dying for Angola, Algeria, apartheid, and all the other blots on Western democracy.
>
> What can one do to try and lead a happy, normal life?"
> (Judith Cook, the Guardian, 6.11.61:6).

1. See Driver (1964:127), for a brief account of women's protests at this time.

2. Driver (1964:127).

3. Driver (1964:127).

Some of the women who replied advised Judith Cook on the strategies they had adopted to lead a 'normal life' in the face of the unbearable fear of nuclear war, and all, to quote Judith Cook writing again in the Guardian (4.12.61), 'seem to find that the most agonising feeling is that of being able to do nothing to prevent the drift towards nuclear war'. Inspired by their common feeling, they formed a women's peace group, the Voice of Women, which was still active at the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. About half of these women had never been drawn to any protest movement or women's pressure group before.[1]

It does reflect badly on the CND that such a strong current of feeling among women was left untapped; that so many members or potential members had not been drawn into the campaign. Many women had been drawn into the nuclear disarmament movement nonetheless, constrained but not marginalised or excluded by the predominantly male and middle-aged leadership, or the many thousands of male members. In contradistinction to mainstream political life in Britain, where women's influence on politics has typically been mediated through men, women claimed the right to campaign, actively and urgently, to an extent perhaps unparalled since the suffragette movement of 40 years before.[2]

## The Demise of the 'First-Wave'

The nuclear disarmament movement continued to explore both parliamentary and extra-parliamentary roads to change. The CND, heartened by the Labour Party's vote in favour of unilateralism in 1960 focused on consititutional action - talks, letters, marches, lobbies. The DAC meanwhile was very mistrustful of this strategy, and continued to organise various direct action demonstrations against the bomb.

1. From Driver(1964:127). He is citing a survey Judith Cook made of her respondents.
2. See Taylor and Pritchard (1964:160) for the differences between male and female respondents on the reasons for CND's failure. These point to differences in political orientation between men and women.

They both had considerable success. CND groups had grown rapidly. (By April 1959, there were 130 in the London area alone).[1] The size of the annual Aldermaston march increased nearly every year. (On the last day of the march, in 1959, Peace News reported that 15,000 marchers entered Trafalgar Square; in 1960, the number was 40,000; in 1961, it was 'at least' 32,000; in 1962, the numbers leapt to 150,000; in 1963, there were 70,000; and the 1964, 20,000). In addition, there were innumerable locally organised marches, rallies, weeks of action, all over Britain.

This activity was sustained despite the setbacks that the movement suffered. The fact that the Labour Party executive ignored the unilateralism vote in its policy statements, expelled dissenters from the Parliamentary Labour Party, and campaigned to have the vote reversed, did not stop people campaigning for nuclear disarmament by constitutional means.[2] But people were, understandably,disheartened.

The threat of war over Berlin through the summer and autumn of 1961, and the resumption of testing by the USSR and the USA[3] served to heighten the fears on which the movement had, in part, grown. It was the Committee of 100 that mobilised this fear. Formed in September 1960, the Committee of 100 set out to mobilise mass civil disobedience against the bomb. Ralph Schoenman, the prime mover of the scheme, won the support of Bertrand Russell, the CND's President and of Michael Randle, the DAC's Chairman.[4]

They attempted to find one hundred 'noteable' people who would give their names to civil disobedience. They did not find a hundred 'noteable' people but they did find many thousands who were impatient with the 'stodginess"

1. See PN 10.4.59.

2. See PN 16.12.60 and 17.3.61 for reports of this. Five MP's were expelled from the Parliamentary Labour Party for voting against the defence estimates.

3. This occurred on 31.8 and 6.9. respectively. See Taylor and Pritchard (1980:11).

4. See Taylor and Pritchard (1980:179).

of the CND. Russell's feeling that 'events' were 'moving too quickly for the present policy of our Campaign'[1] was widely shared. '... a new mood, more militant, more aggressive, and more concerned with 'Movement power' than with Parliamentary politics, was emerging', commented Taylor and Pritchard (1980:9). '... with the dead-end of the labourist tactic becoming increasingly apparent through 1961, the Committee of 100 had the initiative, for good or ill, in 1961 and the early part of 1962'. (Ibid:10).

The Committee of 100 did win considerable support. 4,000 people, according to Peace News, sat-down outside the Ministry of Defence in London on 18.2.61. Several further sit-downs followed, and the third, in Parliament Square on 29.4.61, resulted in 826 arrests, from a crowd of 2,500.[2] This event received an 'exceptional amount of publicity' - both the numbers of people who were arrested, and the violent way they were treated. In September, a protest at the prospect of war in Berlin, 12,000 people had 'sat-down', and a massive 1,314 were arrested.[3] And in a simultaneous demonstration at Holy Loch, 1,000 people protested, and 281 arrests were made.[4]

Police tactics hardened still further in the following months. Five of the committee's key activists were arrested following a raid on the committee's office and charged with conspiracy under the Official Secrets Act.[5] One effect of this was to disrupt the committee's next planned action, a 'national day of civil disobedience' to run simultaneously at seven different sites. These still went ahead - between 6,000 and 7,000 people

1. See PN 7.10.60.

2. See PN 5.5.61.

3. See PN 22.9.61. 36 members of the committee had been bound over to keep the peace. 32 had refused, and were sentenced to imprisonment (See Taylor and Pritchard, 1980:11 and PN 15.9.61).

4. See PN 22.9.61.

5. See Taylor and Pritchard (1980:11). In February they were given prison sentences of 18 and 12 months.

participated, and 850 arrests were made.[1] But the numbers had been large enough neither to close the bases nor to continue the committee's trend in attracting ever increasing numbers of participants. And with key members in prison, and several thousands with sentences or fines behind them, the committee was in something of a quandary over how to proceed.

The movement as a whole was not achieving its aim. The news was not all bad: the Berlin crisis had not resulted in war; the Labour Party conference in 1961 while it did not vote for unilateralism, did vote against Polaris.[2] But in practice, there was very little evidence of tangible success. The Labour Party was putting up great resistence to unilateralism; and even the opinion polls showed no advance in support.[3] The movement was not losing its supporters, but neither constitutional nor unconstitutional action promised any greater success in the future than they had in the past.

Some nuclear disarmers joined the Labour Party all the same. The reversal of the unilateralism vote in 1961 confirmed Gaitskell as the 'bogy' of the Labour Party. When he was replaced by Wilson on his sudden death in 1963, some nuclear disarmers became Labour Party members. Wilson had after all opposed the introduction of health service charges, back in 1951. But to quote Parkin, 'The anti-bomb crusade in the Labour Party died with Hugh Gaitskell'. (Parkin, 1968:138). Wilson, in his turn, was to betray them. Despite the pledge in the 1964 election manifesto to cancel Polaris, the new Labour Government went ahead with a reduced programme on the grounds that work was already too advanced.[4] Other nuclear disarmers gave their support to INDEC, a group that was planning to put up unilateralist candidates in the forthcoming election-a strategy that had very little

1. PN 24.11.61.
2. The figures were 3,611,000 to 2,739,000. From PN 13.10.61.
3. See Taylor and Pritchard (1980:12).
4. Raymond Williams describes how nuclear disarmers joined the Labour Party in Williams (1979:366-7).

success.[1]

Two events had particular importance in the nuclear disarmament movement's pending decline. The first was the Cuban missile crisis in 1962. Then, East and West came closer to a non-accidental nuclear war than they had ever come before. For a few tense days in October, Kennedy and Krushchev practiced nuclear 'diplomacy', and nuclear war did seem very close indeed. April Carter, a member of the DAC and the Committee of 100, recalled these tense days.

> "I was very frightened indeed, I've never been so frightened before or since. I remember we really did feel, and quite rightly too, that the world was on the brink of nuclear war ... We had a sense of absolute helplessness. People demonstrated because there seemed nothing else to do."(April Carter, interview).

In the face of such imminent danger, the protest movement had felt itself to be powerless: while the 'superpowers' argued it out, there was nothing the peace movement could do. The movement was further deflated, somewhat ironically, by the fact that nuclear war had not occurred. Fear gave way to relief, and perhaps to the dangerous hope that nuclear weapons were just 'diplomatic' weapons after all. In the aftermath of an averted disaster, and with the prospect of long and arduous campaigning, many nuclear disarmers were more than ready to retreat from active protest.

The second event was the adoption of the limited Test Ban Treaty in 1963. The treaty had the effect not of stopping nuclear testing, but of hiding it, for tests were now carried out under ground. This was seen as a limited success. 'The world was somewhat safer in the '60s than the late '50s because governments were more aware of strategic thinking and arms control', recalled

1. Edward Thompson and John Saville were two new left people who supported this. See their articles in PN, 6.10.61.

April Carter (interview). And this sense, realistic or no, gave some consolation to the many activists who had given four or more years of their lives to the campaign.

For all that it failed, the 'first wave' of the nuclear disarmament movement was novel and exciting in its day, and its significance extended beyound its declared aim. The 'release from stuffiness' that the movement expressed was a release from the rather austere conventions of the mid-1950s. It was a place where people shared common experiences and were free to express themselves in new and relatively liberating ways. Its supporters took varied messages from their days in the campaign. Some of those who had been very active in civil disobedience became very aware of the coercive nature of the 'military state', and broadened the scope of their protest.[1] Some, as we have seen, supported INDEC or joined the Labour Party. And some left political campaigning, for varied lengths of time, but not without a much sharper understanding of the resisitence of parliamentary democracy to popular pressure for change.[2]

1. Peter Cadogan argued this very strongly in PN 17.11.61. The Committee of 100 continued to campaign for nuclear disarmament and what were felt to be related issues till it disbanded in 1968. See Taylor and Pritchard (1980:14).

2. See Taylor and Pritchard (1980;161) for a description of their respondents' views on CND's achievements beyond the nuclear issue.

# CHAPTER 8

## 'ONLY CONNECT:[1] THE UNIVERSITIES AND LEFT REVIEW

> "I'm telling you we don't know what we are or where we come from, I'm telling you something's cut us off from the beginning. I'm telling you we've got no roots." Beatie in Roots.2

The H bomb was the worst feature of a social system that the nascent new left opposed. It was a symbol at once of undemocratic rule, of the absurdity of capitalist priorities, of the urgency of political protest. The new left attempted to draw the connections between a lack of democracy and inhumane priorities in our 'whole way of life' under capitalism. From weapons policy to welfare; from the media to industry to foreign policy, it identified the absence of popular participation, of democratic control, of humanitarian ends. And in the face of the 'mass' society that it saw developing, the new left sought to defend socialist values from further erosion, and to foster a new confidence in the potential for change.

The Universities and Left Review combined these concerns in the 'culture and community' theme. It hoped that this theme would give it 'some vantage point from which to make a deep criticism, not merely of some institutions, but of a whole culture - a way of life, under capitalism' (Editorial ULR 5:3) Raymond Williams had been very influential here. He was one of the 'grey eminences'[3] behind the Universities and Left Review, who had come to know the journal's editors through 'mutual friends at Oxford'.[4] Looking back, Raymond Williams recalled how, by age, he belonged with the New Reasoner. But he found himself more interested in the Universities and Left Review . Drawn to its concern with the problem of popular culture

1. From E.M. Forster's Howards End, quoted by Kullman (1958:80).
2. Wesker (1960:148).
3. Gabriel Pearson (interview).
4. Williams (1979:361).

and life-style, and its contemporary emphasis, he preferred it to the the New Reasoner's project of reworking the past.[1]

Raymond Williams' Culture and Society, first published in 1958, was an extremely influential book for the Universities and Left Review. Written in an attempt to counter 'the increasing contemporary use of the concept of culture against democracy, socialism, the working class or popular education', (Williams, 1979: 98) it developed, in a theoretical way, many of the central concerns of the Universities and Left Review. Despite his lesser intentions, Raymond Williams succeeded in giving voice to a new, socialist tradition.[2]

In Culture and Society, Raymond Williams examined a series of statements by individual writers from the 19th Century on, all of whom made significant attempts to define the place of culture in social life. His purpose was to reassert an understanding of culture as 'relations between elements in a whole way of life' (Williams,1963: 12) - and, for his many Universities and Left Review readers, he most definitely succeeded.

Raymond Williams traced what was both an interpretive and an evaluative understanding of culture, and applied it to the present. To his belief in a genuinely democratic and egalitarian community, he counterposed the degraded and exploited and divided lives that people suffer. To the 'means of communication' that treated people as 'masses' he counterposed a 'common culture', to be built on the experiences that people shared.

1. See Williams (1979: 98). He had not been a member of a political or literary discussion group since his CP days in the war.

2. By the time Culture and Society was published, the political climate was very different from when it was written. In 1948, when the book was started, Williams had been working in isolation. The movement that was to campaign on grounds that he could actively support arose before his book was published, but after it was written. (See Williams, 1979: 106-7; 109-110).

In considering how a 'common culture' could be rebuilt, Raymond Williams began by comparing the 'alternative ideas of the nature of social relationship' (Williams, 1963:311) of the bourgeoisie and the working class. It was to the ideas of the working class that he looked for future advance. Against bourgeois individualism and service, he placed working class community and solidarity; againstthe social domination of the bourgeoisie, he placed the 'unofficial democracies' that the working class have developed. But he was cautious nonetheless. He argued that working class notions of community and of solidarity had been developed in the face of attack, and embodied a defensiveness that had to be overcome. He looked to openness, variation and dissidence and not to the rigidity and intolerance that have been understandable but negative features of working class life.

The Universities and Left Review took up Raymond Williams' wide understanding of culture. It concerned itself with the 'lived experience' of the working class, investigating several features of contemporary capitalism that had been more or less neglected by socialists in the past. It studied town living and town planning; youth; race; education; welfare; the media. And its goal: to help foster 'positive communities' in the place of the decaying and limited communities that they uncovered, was shared with Raymond Williams too.

A striking absence from their study of community life, and from their notion of 'positive communities', was the family. Even this younger generation of socialists were silent here. We have already seen how the new 'welfare state' was organised around the family; how the quality of family relationships only assumed any political importance when the family did not appear to be fulfilling its perceived social function (such as maintaining the birth rate); how traditional relationships within the home were very widely defended, regardless of documented unhappiness and, indeed, Simone de Beauviour's critique.

The left also believed in the family. It had little to say about it, joining with the general affirmation of family relationships, and making little criticism of gender differences within the home. For the left as for the right, the family only entered the province of politics in relation to welfare policy and education. Its support for better working conditions and equal pay for women did not lead to reflection on the significance of women's greater responsibilities in the home.

The Universities and Left Review was no exception here. On the whole, it left research on trends in the family to other researchers, limiting its own comment to praising what was good.[1] For all its interests in the community and in the individuals' experience of life, neither family relationships nor indeed personal relationships more generally, came under their broadened definition of 'the political'. And these young new lefters, despite their unconventionality, got married themselves, 'as one did in those days, in an unproblematic way '.[2]

Raymond Williams had provided no insight here. His list of key words with which to understand the changes that have come with the industrial revolution - industry, democracy, class, art, culture - did not include the family, nor did he discuss any of these words in a gender specific way. And all the key thinkers to whom he had turned to trace our understanding of culture were male, who worked themselves within patriarchial definitions of social life. Raymond Williams only discussed women when his authors did. And then, he did not question their social position or their social role. Quoting D.H.Lawrence on how 'our civilisation ... has almost destroyed the natural flow of common sympathy between men and men, and men and women

1. Raphael Samuel (who was known as Ralph at this time) did research the family, as he was employed on the Bethnal Green studies. But he mentioned the family only once in the Universities and Left Review when defending the strengths of working class culture. See Samuel (1959:49).
2. Hannah Mitchell (interview).

(Williams, 1963:213), Williams did not consider the 'flow of common sympathy' between women themselves. Given the conventional use of 'he' to refer to both women and men, and to men alone, we cannot tell how Raymond Williams intended that women be included in his discussion of culture. This was the most unfortunate absence since, in defining culture very broadly as 'relations between elements in a whole way of life' (Williams, 1963:12), and in focusing on 'lived experience' under capitalism, he had provided a model for analysing social relations in which gender, very easily, could have a place.

Richard Hoggart's The Uses of Literacy, first published in 1957, was something of a twin book to Culture and Society. It was also widely read and discussed by the Universities and Left Review's supporters. In The Uses of Literacy, Hoggart had set out to describe working class relationships and attitudes - 'the people'. He drew on his own experience of working class family and community life in the midlands of England before the war, and 'data from the sociologists'.Hoggart had a political motive in writing his book: he wanted to help protect traditional working class culture from the growing threat of the commercial media, since he doubted whether they could resist this threat alone.

Richard Hoggart differed from Raymond Williams in that he did discuss the family. For him, the working class family was the heart of working class life. It was the place where the divisions of gender and of age produced a personal, concrete, local and relatively harmonious social world. He did describe the differential taks and experiences of family members, but little of the power and inequalities in family living came through.

The Universities and Left Review did not pick up Hoggart's romantic view of the family. Its attention was drawn, instead, to the threat that working class communities were under, and away from the families on which

communities were built. The threat that the media posed to traditional communities was taken very seriously by the Universities and Left Review. The media became one of its key concerns, and was widely debated in the years to come.[1]

The Uses of Literacy was also significant to the Universities and Left Review for a very different reason. In his chapter 'Scholarship Boy'. Hoggart spoke to many in the new left who had come from working class backgrounds, but who had been 'declassed' through education. With the advent of the grammar schools and the growth in the number of universities, more working class children were becoming 'scholarship boys', and girls,[2] receiving higher education in predominantly middle class institutions. On completing their formal education, these young people moved into the middle class professions, and found that they had lost their original class identity, but were not properly middle class. This experience was shared by several of the main characters associated with the Universities and Left Review, such as Alan Lovell and Rod Prince. Several others were sensitive to it since they too had been to grammar rather than public schools, and were the 'lower classes' at Oxford university.

The Universities and Left Review was a young people's journal, with contemporary concerns. It looked at communities as well as industry, at 'experience', at 'the people', taking in those areas that more traditional socialist analysis was missing. It did not engage in a detailed way with marxism: both class and social structure remained outside its immediate concerns.

1. The articles the ULR carried on the media included Anderson (1957a,b); Coppard and Coppard (1958); Derrick (1958); Hoggart (1958); Prince (1958); Williams (1958); Whannel (1959).

2. It is impossible to say whether Richard Hoggart and others intended 'scholarship boy' to include 'scholarship girl' as well. The particular difficulties that girls experience in moving away not only from their class, but also from their gender, were never topics of new left writing.

We have seen how marxism was almost exclusively the prerogative of the Communist Party at this time. Economist and deterministic in emphasis, it carried with the Stalinism of the CP itself. Unlike today, there was no lively tradition of marxist culture or social science. Dissident voices within the CP were muted by their party membership; marxists outside the CP were few. The richer marxism of the 1930s was a point of reference only, not a point of searching debate and growth.

As the opportunity for political discussion widened, this new generation of socialists around the Universities and Left Review did not embark on a detailed reappraisal of Marx. Instead, its concern to widen socialist thinking led them away from marxist discourse, and into the 'culture and community' theme. The editors explained this direction very clearly in issues 4 and 5.

> "We want to breakaway from the traditions which see economic or political man as separate from man in the centre of a web of human relations, which draw him into the full life of his community - which consider 'economic' or 'political' life as a lower form of existence, as an external prop to the private life of the individual, rather than as his very nature. We want to break with the view that cultural or family life is an entertaining sideshow, a secondary expression of human creativity or fulfilment. There can be no simple base-superstructure model here, for that is to offer too limited a conception of our special nature. Man, as Marx himself said, is both limited and free, both formed by his society and free to transform it. (Editorial, ULR 4:3).

Reference was made to the young Marx; alienation was one of the Universities and Left Review's key concerns.[1] But Marx's own writing was not discussed at any length. Reference to it was more often by way of legitimating their concerns. Raymond Williams, who did after all have great authority with the Universities and Left Review, saw his own work as being true to Marx. He maintained that Marx's own thought embodied

1. See Taylor (1958) and Hall (1958b), for example.

more flexibility, more recognition of complexity, than many of the attempts to 'develop' his thought since his death. Williams' summarised where a genuinely marxist theory of culture would start in this way.

> "A Marxist theory of culture will recognise diversity and complexity, will take account of continuity within change, will allow for chance and certain limited autonomies, but, with these reservations, will take the facts of the economic structure and the consequent social relations as the guiding string on which a culture is woven, and by following which a culture is to be understood. This, still an emphasis rather than a substantiated theory, is what Marxists or our own century received from their tradition."(Williams, 1963:261-2).

He did not think that the lack of emphasis on the economic as a determining element in this schema contradicted Marx. Only 'ultimately determining', and never isolated, he argued that marxists could never know exactly how it affected particular areas of social life.

The Universities and Left Review likewise eschewed a simple base-superstructure model of social relations. But it postponed any attempt to develop a more sophisticated model that would allow for the autonomy of the non-economic. It embarked, firstly, on 'mapping out' the present, gathering material that would inform theoretical debate. It did not want to arrive at a new 'position' that could be closely theorised or indeed pinned down. The Universities and Left Review editors hoped, instead, to facilitate a new tradition in socialist thought, a tradition in which 'a hundred schools' could contend.[1]

This proved to be a dissatisfying path to take. Their project was so wide, and their hopes so high, that success of necessity eluded them. Redefining humanism and socialism was far easier said than done. The range of issues that the Universities and Left Review took on board made this task more overbearing still. In addition, there were real differences between members of

1. See Editorial (ULR 4:3) where this approach was explained. Mao's '100 flowers' speech was made on 27.3.57.

the editorial board. But in the face of the enormous pressure to produce the journal, to organise the movement, to open up areas for socialist analysis, these differences were barely discussed and never resolved. In the end, the Universities and Left Review, following its merger with the New Reasoner, was superceded by a 'theoreticist' approach to socialism.

That there were theoretical differences between the editors came through in one debate the journal carried between Stuart Hall and Ralph Samuel. This debate was the more significant as Stuart Hall and Ralph Samuel were known to differ by those close to the journal, and each had personal followers from amongst the review's supporters. Their differences were not only theoretical. They also had different personal and political styles, which, as much as their ideas, won or lost them support. As Gabriel Pearson, a member of the editorial team recalled (and others confirmed):

> "In theory it was a genuine quadrumvirate, which really operated according to who had the most energy and vitality, and I suppose Stuart provided the steadiness, the elements of organisation, and I think Raphael provided the energy really. Charles Taylor seemed rather more remote from it, and I think I was very peripheral really - I think I was the least active member of that quadrumvirate. I don't think I had a very crucial role ... The really important people were Raphael and Stuart. That represented rightly the real union between the ex-communist left, and the somewhat equivocal left socialism of the period." (Gabriel Pearson, interview).

(He added too that 'a lot of our energies were directed towards trying to control Raphael's total demonic, unmanageable energies' - something that others also confirmed).

Stuart Hall, in 'A Sense of Classlessness', ULR 5, argued that socialists had failed to understand how much capitalism and class consciousness had changed since the war. They had persisted in predicting the 'coming slump', whereas the system had grown to be remarkably stable; they still looked to falling living standards, whereas even working class people were experiencing

rising prosperity. He saw this failure as resulting from an economic-determinist marxism that had over-emphasised the primacy of the economic base, and simplified the relationship between base and superstructure.

Stuart Hall proposed here that this model be inverted. He argued that socialists should begin by looking at what have previously been seen as 'superstructural' features. The features - and he listed 'cultural alienation and exploitation'; our 'structures of assumptions' and our ideas; our personal and moral choices - had all become 'so ramified and complex! that socialists should start by examining them. Indeed, he believed that 'the material base' could not be understood on its own.

Socialist values were central to Stuart Hall's 'socialist humanism'. He traced how they had been developed by the working class in the process of resisting and rejecting the values of capitalist society. He, like Richard Hoggart, believed that now they were under very real threat. As living standards rose, he feared that the working class were in danger of losing their socialism to the ideology of a 'people's capitalism'; and of losing their class consciousness to the 'sense of classlessness' that was accompanying capitalism's latest successes. The campaign for workers' control was being displaced by 'joint consultation'; the unity of working class communities was being broken down by individual consumerism, and separate 'styles of living'.

Stuart Hall stated clearly here that this 'sense of classlessness' was a false one; that the working class had merely 'freed itself for new and more subtle forms of enslavement'. He maintained too that this enslavement would only disappear when the whole social system, and not just the super-structure, was transformed. He still came in for some very pointed criticism from Ralph Samuel.

In 'Class and Classlessness', ULR 6, Ralph Samuel took issue with Stuart Hall's depiction of the changing face of capitalism, and of the erosion of working class consciousness. He argued that capitalism had stabilised not in the 1950s but in the 1840s, and that many of the features that Stuart Hall saw as contemporary features had been with us from that time. In addition, the traditional working class communities had been formed under the very pressures - of geographical and social mobility, of the impact of the mass media, of status differentiation - that Stuart Hall thought were destroying them to-day.

Ralph Samuel made a very strong case for the resilience of working class consciousness.

> "We underestimate the strength and importance of working-class values if we think they can disappear before the impact of the washing machine and the 'Practical Householder' ...
>
> ... why should we assume that images so 'banal', trivialised and 'candy floss' have overwhelmed a strong working-class culture or are likely to do so?" (Samuel, 1959:49).

He concluded by stating that if socialism had weakened in the last decade, it was not because capitalism had changed, but because socialists had failed to offer 'a meaningful picture of the society in which we live or an alternative vision of the socialist society which people can make' (Ibid:50). To achieve this, socialists had to look again at the enduring strengths of the working class, and not exaggerate and indeed misconstrue its failings.

> "Socialism must start from the existing strengths of working people, from their power to assimilate what is valuable and reject what is false in post-war society. In a period of unexampled prosperity the Labour Movement and working people generally have remained immune to the grosser forms of capitalist persuasion. Socialism is not only, as is sometimes said, a society for people - it is also a society that they will create." (Ibid:50).

Ralph Samuel was restating here the traditional marxist view that class conflict, and, with it, the socialist consciousness of the working class, were

inherent to the capitalist system and could not be argued away. The working class was exploited and oppressed, and working class consciousness was a product of oppression. It could not be so easily undermined.

Ralph Samuel's was essentially a defensive stance: defensive of a marxist analysis of the contradictions in capitalism as against the revisionist idea that capitalism had changed; defensive of the socialist consciousness of the working class as against the idea that they were being incorporated into the pervasive consumerism and individualism of their day; defensive of the socialist values that were already embodied in the culture that the working class had already created. Whilst he shared with Stuart Hall a belief in the centrality of human agency in the building of socialism, he differed, very basically, on the question of how far capitalism had changed and the significance of these changes for the relationship between agency and class position.

The Universities and Left Review's editors, aware from the very beginning of the very real differences between them, did not attempt to resolve them. Committed to the creation of a socialism in which 'a hundred schools' could contend, their varying backgrounds and political perspectives did not lead them to produce 'the journal of marxist opinion' about which Isaac Deutscher had enquired. Instead, the journal carried a range of writing, contemporary in content, 'modern' in style, somewhat hortatory in tone. Some of this writing did come out of the Universities and Left Review's own research. The group studying town planning produced articles both on old and new towns. Individuals contributed material on young people and education. A Universities and Left Review team embarked on an 'in-depth' study of industrial control.

Work on towns, on young people, on education, fitted easily into the journal's 'culture and community' theme. Writers took up the issue of the quality of

life, investigating the experience of new town living for example, and considering the place of arts in everyday life.[1] The study of town planning was seen as offering much scope for the consideration of both the erosion and the potential of town life. Here, the successes, the failures and the potential of planning under capitalism were considered by various authors, whose judgements were informed by the albeit limited study of the experience of life in the inner cities, the suburbs and the new towns.[2]

Several authors placed their comments in an historical context. Tracing the growth of the modern architecture movement in the 1930s, and the changing planning legislation under the 1945 Labour Government, one author Gorden Redfern[3] described how radical plans had been shelved or whittled down; how planning that had come to fruition had been 'timid and without imagination'; how Labour may have succeeded in achieving a measure of slum clearance, but had built up architectural, social or cultural deserts in its stead. In fact none of these authors were particularly enamoured of the new towns or the growing suburbs, and all of them argued for the creation of more convivial environments where a broader and more dynamic and more expressive social life could ensue. In part, their interest stemmed from their negative assessment of city life. They saw the city as representing the state of 'our' civilisation - and the city's not inconsiderable limitations and decay as emblematic of the evils in social life as a whole.

The Universities and Left Review's interest in the new towns was enhanced by the idealism in the way these towns had been conceived. The vision

1. See Taylor (1958) for example.

2. Articles in the ULR on town planning included Harlow (1958); Gregory-Jones (1957); Samuel (1957a); Shankland (1957); Redfern (1958).

3. Redfern (1958).

of the 'whole person', living and working and spending leisure time in the same geographical setting carried much appeal. It was hoped that 'man's inherent goodness, neighbourliness, and sense of brotherhood would thrive' there. (Hase , 1958:20). True to its commitment to uncover the 'felt life' of 'the people', ULR 5 carried an account of the impressions of new town dwellers. The researchers concluded from their interviews that there was no 'true' community spirit in the new towns.

> "... where youth supposedly is well-educated and provided for, young people are vaguely dissatisfied, aimless, disintegrated. Where class consciousness is theoretically denied, working class people are consciously trying to elevate themselves, lulled into a belief in the dream land of status through possessions; where the concept of a true community is advanced as a motivating factor for the New Town's inauguration, no true community in the senses indicated elsewhere in this issue of ULR seems to exist." (Janet Hase, 1958:23).

These ULR authors did not succeed in clarifying what a 'true community' would look like. One author attempted to define it in terms of the need to 'mould the decayed and amoral to proper function'; (Redfern, 1958:10) to rejuvenate 'the will to act ... along productive lines' (Ibid:10). His goal was an environment where beauty and happiness could flourish for their own sakes, freed from the limiting and corrupting needs of capitalism. 'To produce total environment and then perhaps total man is the aim. It must not be compromised', he extolled. (Redfern, 1958:10).

Writing such as this directs us quite sharply to a central problem of the Universities and Left Review, the problem of discovering a language. The over-confident and often military rhetoric of Stalinism on the one hand, and the uninspired language of social democracy on the other, had left this new generation 'wordless'. Jostling with the problems of finding an audience and defining their goals, ULR authors never did discover a comprehensible language of their own.

## Youth and the Universities and Left Review

The late 1950s saw the beginnings of the radicalisation of youth. On the one hand, youth culture became more openly rebellious: 'rock and roll' and 'skiffle'; 'Teddy Boys'; a supposed increase in juvenile delinquency. On the other hand, young people were drawn into political activity. They went on CND marches; joined the Labour Party Young Socialists; (launched in 1960); and they formed the new left.

The Universities and Left Review was a young socialists' journal. Its editors, close in age to this new constituency for political campaigning, were committed to winning young people's support. Their supporters were young on the whole, and almost exclusively middle class. The Universities and Left Review and its supporters were concerned too with working class youth. As working class young people were labelled as a 'problem' by policy makers and political commentators, the Universities and Left Review embarked on understanding their world.

The Notting Hill race riots in London in 1958 came as a shock to everyone on the left. The Universities and Left Review saw them as a tragic example of the crisis in community living that they had already named: they were evidence of the failure of the 'welfare state'; of the education system; of town planning; of socialist values in our relationships with others. These riots spurred the Universities and Left Review's supporters to become involved in community politics (they were very active in setting up community groups both in North Kensington and Notting Hill),[1] and to give close and urgent attention to youth.

1. They started a trend that endured in Notting Hill, and that was taken up in other parts of London too. When more left clubs were formed in 1959-60, they also became involved in community politics. Clubs in London came together to organise an ambitious 'London belongs to you' project early in 1960. (From an undated circular sent out to London left clubs).

The Universities and Left Review began by describing how young working class people had created their own culture to give meaning to their lives. Beyond the school gates, and outside school hours, they enjoyed the song and skiffle, rock and roll, the drain-pipe jeans, Tony Curtis haircuts, that they had created. Some enjoyed violence too. The Universities and Left Review saw their violence, their racism, their gang life, their music and dancing as the products of opposition to the stifling adult world. Denied independent expression or meaningful relationships within 'conformist class culture', they had moved outside it. They had become 'disaffected' youth.

The Universities and Left Review carried several articles on working class youth. Derek Allcorn wrote a report on the social life of young men in an industrial suburb;[1] Greta Duncan and Roy Wilkie conducted a brief study of Glasgow adolescents;[2] Stuart Hall (who was a secondary school teacher himself) considered the significance of belonging to the 'secondary modern generation'[3], They were none of them particularly enthusiastic about the socialist potential of youth culture. Its violence and racism had alerted them to its dangers, and they did not think it had the resilience to resist the pressures of consumerism, of the 'mass' society that the Universities and Left Review feared was undermining the traditional culture of the working class.

In discussing the limitations of youth culture, Stuart Hall made the interesting point that this generation lacked the vocabulary to turn their discontents, their sense of oppression, into political demands. Post-war socialism had failed to give them any basis for seeing their personal experiences in political terms.

1. See Allcorn (1958).
2. See Duncan and Wilkie (1958).
3. See Hall (1959a). Other articles the ULR carried on youth included Michael Armstrong (1957); John Dixon and Sidney Lubin (1957).

> "Our politics has no emotional resonance, and no humanity: it is stiff, and dry and colourless and conciliatory. It cannot connect together with any thread the private and public: and therefore for many young people it is deeply irrelevant." (Stuart Hall, 1959a:3).

This contemporary statement of the relationship between the public and the private pointed directly to the Universities and Left Review's interest in experience. Raymond Williams' claim in Culture and Society that there were no 'masses' had great resonance with the ULR. He maintained there that

> "There are in fact no masses; there are only ways of seeing people as masses. In an urban industrial society there are many opportunities for such ways of seeing. The point is not to reiterate the objective conditions but to consider, personally and collectively, what these have done to our thinking. The fact is, surely, that a way of seeing other people which has become characteristic of our kind of society, has been capitalized for the purposes of political or cultural exploitation." (Williams, 1963:289).

In focusing on 'lived experience' under capitalism, the Universities and Left Review was attempting to rescue people from being seen in this way.

## The Insiders

The Universities and Left Review, committed to a socialism conceived as 'a whole way of life', did not entirely disregard the economic. Those writers, such as Charles Taylor, who argued against Marx's focus on the point of production, did so in order to draw the attention of socialists to the whole community. This did result in the relative neglect both of the economic in its own right, and of the place of the economic in the Universities and Left Review's broadly conceived notion of culture. But the economic, despite its absence from much of the writing the Universities and Left Review carried, was, as we shall see, the topic of the journal's most serious piece of research.

The Universities and Left Review's debate on the economic was addressed, primarily,to the question of how far capitalism had changed. Taking up

both a traditional marxist analysis of the contradictions in capitalism, and the ideas of the revisionists on capitalism's new, more responsible phase, contributors expressed varied opinions on the strengths and weaknessness of contemporary capitalism. The two key features of contemporary capitalism with which they were particularly concerned were firstly the apparent stability of capitalism, and secondly the rise in living standards of the working class. Marx's theory that the falling rate of profit and the growing misery of the working class would ensure ever-worsening crises, and the system's collapse, had little appeal in the late 1950s. Capitalism did appear to be remarkably stable, and capable of growth. Universities and Left Review authors, questioning whether Marx had been finally 'disaproved', gave serious attention to the case that the Labour Party revisionists had made. Some gave credence to John Strachey's thesis that modern capitalism contained an inherent contradiction between the extension of democracy, and the centralisation of economic power. But they rejected the more right-wing revisionism of authors such as C.A.R.Crosland, and embarked on some empirical research of their own.

The Insiders was published first as a pamphlet, and sold at the 1957 Labour Party conference. It set out to criticise the document Industry and Society which, as we have seen, was debated and adopted there. It was subsequently reprinted in Universities and Left Review 3 . Industry and Society had met with a mixed reception at conference. Its analysis of contemporary capitalism - of the separation of ownership from control, of the rise of the managerial elite; of the genesis of the 'responsible' firm - was quite warmly welcomed, even by many on the left. More controversial were the policy recommendations that Industry and Society contained, particularly on nationalisation. No specific concerns were mentioned. Instead, only (unnamed) industries that were 'seriously failing the nation' were considered appropriate candidates for state ownership. With more prosperous industries, the state, far from

pursuing a policy of nationalisation, would attempt to become a part-owner, for financial gain. It was not intended that the state take control of the private sector since, in the age of 'responsible management', private industry was already ensuring that the interests of the community were adequately served.

The left at conference took issue with the revisionist policy on nationalisation, firstly because extended nationalisation was the traditional demand of the Labour left, and secondly because the notion that the state become a partner in capitalist industry was anathema to any idea of a socialist state. Some left-wingers saw Industry and Society's 'capitalist' policy prescriptions as running counter to the document's radical analysis of post-war capitalism. It was this argument that The Insiders set out to disprove. For the authors of The Insiders, Industry and Society's policy recommendations on nationalisation did follow logically from its analysis of capitalism. They argued that it was at the level of analysis, not of policy, that Industry and Society had to be opposed.

The Insiders was drawn together by a range of authors. Three of the Universities and Left Review's editors - Stuart Hall, Ralph Samuel, Charles Taylor all contributed, joined by Peter Sedgwick, Ralph Miliband, Michael Artis, and Clive Jenkins. The product of a series of discussions between the authors, The Insiders also contained some empirical material on share-holdings and directorships in private industries, and capital investment and board members in nationalised industries.

The Insiders did not discount the view that capitalism had changed. It stated that the days of slump, of mass unemployment, of naked exploitation were over, at least for the time being, not because capitalism had shifted its priorities, but because it needed longer-term stability and better labour relations for its own success. 1950s capitalism was both more stable

and more productive than capitalism had ever been before. But The Insiders' authors did take issue with the changes that revisionist authors had depicted. To the argument that ownership had been separated from control, they produced evidence of a consolidated oligarchy of owners who held an unprecedented degree of power over the whole of the economy. Against the depiction of diffused and functionless shareholders, they showed how large, corporate investors - banks, insurance companies, industrial giants - had built up a network of 'interlocking directorates' that enabled them to control broad sectors of industry whilst they owned only a minority of shares. Against the notion of a disinterested managerial elite for whom production relations and the needs of the community were as important as raising profits, The Insiders argued that managers, incorporated both functionally and ideologically into this oligarchic system, had no such autonomous role: they were not the controllers but merely the caretakers of property. Whilst structure and property relations within capitalism had shifted they had not been transformed; whilst longer term stability and economic growth were relatively novel features of capitalism, the profit motive and the protection of private property were still 'the logic' of the capitalist system; and whilst capitalism may have appeared set on a road of relatively trouble-free growth, problems of investment and consumption, of inflation, of unemployment were, they maintained, inherent to the capitalism system and could only be mitigated at the cost of the provision of welfare and the standard of living of the working class.

The Insiders also argued strongly against the revisionist picture of a stable and responsible capitalism in which, so far as was practicable in any technologically advanced society, the traditional socialist demands for equality, for democracy, for welfare could, with time, be met. Socialist values, they maintained, could never be realised in a society where wealth

was privately owned.

> "A society whose economic foundation is private property remains a class society - even when efficiency and productivity mitigate the sharpness of class divisions. In the end, those who own and control the institutions of private property constitute an exclusive and competitive elite, whose motives and interests are irreconcilable with the interests of society - except through the skilful rhetoric of the company executive. These institutions are profoundly undemocratic - in function and character. As such they are monstrous excrescences in any society which seeks democratic political and economic forms."(ULR, 1958:32).

However they were clearly concerned by the way that capitalism's current success was undermining the appeal of socialist thought.

Having made this case for capitalism's inherent instability, they still concluded by citing what they themselves termed 'the socialist ethic'.

> "The fundamental criticism of capitalism was not simply its inefficiency, or its failure to provide adequate welfare. The fundamental criticism was that every facet of capitalist civilisation combined to impair the wholeness of man's personality." (ULR, 1958:61).

People were still alienated from the means of production; labour was still a commodity; employment was still unfulfilling, since the worker was denied any real measure of control and personal responsibility for the work he or she did.

The Insiders did offer the beginnings of a programme for transforming capitalism. It recommended the extension of public ownership to cover a great deal of industry and property, and argued strongly for a system of industrial democracy to give 'as great a degree of play for individual responsibility to the individual worker as possible'. (Ibid:63). Without this, it claimed that work even in the nationalised industries would remain alienated too.

It was on the theme of the democratisation of power that The Insiders ended. The authors argued that as power was concentrated more and more

in the modern oligopolies, not only employment but community life had become alienated. Meanwhile, it had become increasingly difficult to locate where power lay. As people were better educated to take responsibility, the opportunity had moved ever further from their grasp. 'Joint consultation', within a system where capital was owned by one group, and labour sold by another, would never result in a genuine democracy where people were responsible for all areas of their lives.

The Insiders was not an activist document. It did not prescribe various forms of political activity through which the demands for the democratisation of power could be revived and campaigned for. Individual writers - such as Ralph Miliband - did say that the labour movement had to be won over for the success of any such campaign, though the question of how this could be done was postponed, whilst the Labour Party was challenged at the level of policy.

The Universities and Left Review did print some criticisms of The Insiders criticisms that pointed to the failures of socialist thinking as much as to the shortcomings of The Insiders itself. John Hughes took issue with the poorly researched and theorised ideas on nationalisation and workers' control. He thought the left as a whole were indicted for not giving more time to formulating detailed plans for specific industries. This criticism did hit home, and Michael Barratt-Brown, the economist, was brought onto the board of the Universities and Left Review to add depth to their economic analysis. Michael Barrett-Brown, in two subsequent issues, published lengthy articles containing data relevant to The Insiders[1]

The Universities and Left Review analysis of capitalism held out little hope for revolutionary social change on the basis of contradictions in

1 See Barratt-Brown (1958; 1959a;b).

capitalism as a mode of production. Many writers - and indeed the authors of The Insiders - ended by affirming that socialist values were of paramount importance in the struggle for social change. They had little to say about the prospects for trade-union militancy and its relevance to socialism beyond the implicit judgement that a revolutionary road to change was no longer on the cards. G.D.H.Cole came closest to presenting a socialist strategy, calling for the continuation of the democratic socialist and trade union struggles that had secured the setting up of the welfare state.[1] The Universities and Left Review did not contradict Cole on this - he had great authority even with ex CP members in the early new left - but its political activism barely touched the point of production. Whilst many Universities and Left Review readers, and all the journals editors, were in the Labour Party by the late 1950s, and whilst one editor, Charles Taylor, was particularly active in it, it was the Universities and Left Review club and the Partisan coffee house that took up much of the time and energy of London readers, and the CND that everywhere commanded their enthusiastic support.

## The Universities and Left Review, and politics overseas.

> "Again savage necessity wipes its hands
> Upon the napkin of a dirty cause, again
> A waste of our compassion as with Spain,
> The gorilla wrestles with the superman,
> I, who am poisoned with the blood of both,
> Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?
> I who have cursed
> The drunken officer of British rule, how choose
> Between this Africa and the English tongue I love?
> Betray them both, or give back what they give?
> How shall I face such slaughter and be cool?
> How can I turn from Africa and love?
>
> From Derek Walcott, 'A Far Cry from Africa' [2]

1. See Cole(1957).

2. Walcott (1959) verse 4.

Alongside articles on Britain and British socialism, the Universities and Left Review published material on politics overseas. France was the nearest country which the journal covered. Drawing on its connections with Claude Bourdet and the journal France Observateur, the Universities and Left Review carried articles on French politics and socialism. The growth of a new left in France was watched with live interest, whilst France's ominous drift to the right, given momentum both by the Algerian war and by the election of President de Gaulle in 1958, was traced with anxious concern. Further from home, but, if anything of greater relevance to British socialists, were the growing number of nationalist movements struggling for independence from colonial rule. The Middle East, Cyprus, Africa all featured in articles the Universities and Left Review carried. Again, the journal called on its readers to give what support they could.

The Universities and Left Review did give some space to the recent changes in the Soviet and East European regimes, and, more broadly, to communist movements everywhere. But its editors were not entirely enthusiastic about becoming involved in the debates that were raging on communist history. With the exception of Ralph Samuel, (who wrote not on the British but the French CP), the Universities and Left Review's editors were distanced from these debates by their negative assessment of the Communist Party in Britain, and by a strongly felt desire to move forward from the partisanship of the cold war years. It did not devote very much space to evaluating communism's difficult past, or uncertain future.

The Universities and Left Review's coverage of non-communist countries focused on the links between events and struggles overseas, and their implications for Britain. In the case of France, this involved consideration of the ways Britain could be affected. In the case of struggles against colonialism, it involved recognising the responsibility of the British government, and

hence of British socialists, for decolonisation. It looked, in short, for the connections between politics at home, and politics overseas. The Universities and Left Review did not look for connections so consistently where communist countries were concerned. The journal's editors and contributors found that the discussion of communist politics invariably provoked heated argument. It was not a topic that could, or should, be quietly laid to rest - it was not only CP and ex CP members after all who had a great deal to learn - but it was a hornet's nest.

## The USSR and Eastern Europe

The Universities and Left Review club experienced the controversy over communist politics from its very first meeting when Isaac Deutscher had spoken. We have seen, too, the hostile reception that met Hyman Levy from some of the audience when he spoke openly about the evidence he had found for the persecution of the Jews in the USSR.[1] These meetings did not generate a feeling of shared purpose of common ground. Instead 'tired slogan with weary counter-slogan', to quote Ralph Samuel (1957b:79) were more often the order of the day. They were remarkable nonetheless. The very fact that

> "... young people, whose first political commitment came with Suez and Hungary; active Labour Party, Fabian Society and ISSS members, Marxists and ex-Marxists; academics; specialists coming for a particular speaker and subject" (Samuel, 1957b:79)

ex CP members, CP members and Trotskyists too were gathered together under the one roof, discussing communist history was exceptional enough. Apart from these historic meetings, and two articles in their first issue, neither the club nor the journal gave much space to the 'crisis in communism' through 1957 and the early months of 1958.

A further possible reason for the Universities and Left Review's hesitancy to make connections between communist politics and socialism in Britain

1. See Ch.5.

was the editors relative optimism about the prospects for de-stalinisation.

To quote Charles Taylor, (interview)

> "We were all wrong, totally wrong; we didn't understand Russia at all. ... We saw the Krushchev thaw as a movement to be indefinately extrapolated into the future. We thought it was based on sound sociological grounds, and it wasn't at all. It was a very big mistake. The sociological grounds were simply that as a devloping country like Russia becomes more developed and has a higher standard of education, and needs more technicians and needs more educated people, it becomes more and more difficult to rule. Then it becomes more and more necessary to liberalise and to associate people with power and greater freedoms. So we saw Krushchev as responding to very powerful forces in the Soviet Union which would ensure that the movement would continue. In that, we had very little understanding of Russia or Russian history. We were terribly optimistic ... We were not wrong about Eastern Europe. The forces were there, but Russia's another thing.

The authors the Universities and Left Review published were far from dismissive about the prospects for de-stalinisation too. Isaac Deutscher, in his article in the first issue, had focused on the forces for change within the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. It was clear that he, for one, did still believe in the future of socialism in the USSR not in spite of, but because of, its painful past.

> "A society which has gone through as much as Soviet society has gone through, which has achieved so much and suffered so much, which has seen, within the lifetime of one generation, its whole existence repeatedly shattered, remade and transformed to its very foundations, and which has again and again ascended the highest peaks of hope and heroism and descended to the lowest depths of misery and despair - such a society cannot fail drawing from its rich and uniquely great experience equally great generalising ideas and practical conclusions and embodying these in a programme of action worthy of itself."(Isaac Deutscher, 1957:12).

The Soviet people, he concluded were at last 'relearning freedom'.

This cautious optimism on the part of Isaac Deutscher was shared by another author, K.A.Jelenski who discussed the changes that had been achieved in Poland and Hungary since 1956.[1] In Poland, he noted the inception of

1. See Jelenski (1957).

more open and honest government, and in Hungary, whilst the government made no pretence of being fully representative, it had nonetheless implemented some of the demands made by the revolutionaries. It was, as we shall see, the New Reasoner more than the Universities and Left Review that campaigned for socialists in the non-communist world to make contact with dissidents in the East. The early Universities and Left Review limited its suggestions here to the British based nuclear disarmament campaign. The journal's editors and contributors hoped that the disarmament and ultimately the neutrality of Western Europe would improve the prospects for neutrality and liberalisation in the East: a hope that, again, the New Reasoner was to theorise in greater depth. 'Positive neutralism', as we shall see, was at the heart of the nascent new left's understanding of socialist foreign policy. It promised, at once, to halt and reverse the arms race, and to create a climate in Europe that would aid de-stalinisation in the East. It was very actively campaigned for, particularly by the New Reasoner group.

The Universities and Left Review considered communist politics again in a special editorial in ULR 4. Entitled 'The Bell Tolls Again', it was written in response to the execution of the Hungarian revolutionary leaders. These socialists, this editorial stated, were the 'errors and abuses' of 1956. 'Their crime was that they claimed freedom in the name of socialism, and that is a crime past forgiveness to the enemies of both'. (Editorial 2, ULR 4:13). Even if greater 'flexibility' was now introduced, it had been purchased at an unacceptable price. And considering the possible effects of their death in the West, they concluded 'if the names of Nagy and Maleter are to be invoked, on our side, as an excuse for resuming the Cold War, that will add to the terrorof their assassination, a kind of farcical finality'. (Ibid:13).

In the face of continuing repression in Soviet and East European countries, some Universities and Left Review supporters with a knowledge of East European languages set up a committee to monitor what was happening in East Europe, and the Universities and Left Review club invited speakers on Eastern Europe to an international forum that ran through the spring and summer of 1958. One of these speakers, Gordon Cruikshank, wrote on Poland in the journal.[1] The demands of the Polish workers that he described bore striking resemblance to the demands of the Solidarity movement of today. He, for one, did not have high hopes that they would be met.

Towards the end of 1958, two people who reviewed Boris Pasternak's Doctor Zhivago in the Universities and Left Review found that discussing Soviet history still met with a stormy and hostile reception, when they addressed the Universities and Left Review club. Dr Zhivago had recently been translated into English, and had been widely reviewed both by national newspapers and by literary and political journals. The New Reasoner and the Universities and Left Review reviewed it too. Michael Kullman argued that Dr Zhivago was an extremely important and illuminating work.[2] It revealed, for him, the values on which a humanist commitment should be based. He maintained that Boris Pasternak had much to teach us about 'committed' writing, and much to say on the dilema of how far socialists should be prepared to inflict suffering to achieve a political end.

When Michael Kullman spoke to the Universities and Left Review club on 15.12.58, he found that other speakers were not so ready to draw socialist

1. See Cruikshank (1958).

2. See Kullman (1958b).

lessons from a non-revolutionary work. Stanley Mitchell, whose reply to Michael Kullman was published in Universities and aLeft Review 6,[1] took a very different stance. He argued that 'committed' criticism had a longer and better pedigree than Boris Pasternak, and assessed a work of art on the grounds of whether it was 'progressive' or 'reactionary'. For him, Dr Zhivago was a 'reactionary' work, and contained no insight into commitment. At most, it offered a moving account of Dr Zhivago's tragic desocialisation, of a personal tragedy, not a general one. It was narrowly conceived and individualist; contemptuous of philosophies held in common and ultimately irrationalist. And it justified inaction, even in a time of revolutionary change.

Michael Kullman in his reply pointed to the very major differences between his own, and Stanley Mitchell's approach.[2] He drew a distinction between human values and political ones, and between a work of art and a political tract. That he organised his defence of Dr. Zhivago in terms of the tension between 'human' and 'political' values shows how the early new left had not yet succeeded in its task of creating a truly socialist humanism. These old claims on the Soviet revolution, and this assessment of an individual's socialism in terms of 'progress' or 'reaction' showed how, even within a movement of the non-aligned, old battles were still refought.[3]

France

The Universities and Left Review touched on communist politics again in the writing it carried on France. It was to France that the Universities and

1. See Mitchell (1959).

2. See Kullman (1959).

3. The ULR contained only one short article on China. Its author bemoaned the absence of published work on China that had left socialists with little detailed knowledge of progress there.

Left Review authors looked when tracing Communist Party history in non-communist countries, and when considering the potential of Communist Parties for socialism in the years to come. The Universities and Left Review were interested too in the nascent new left in France. Already boasting 10,000 members when ULR 1 came out[1], the French new left was more like a political party than the British new left would ever be. Indeed, Claude Bourdet who 'led' the ex-CP members among the French new left, looked ahead to unity of various left groups, and ultimately to the unity of all the major left-wing political parties in France.

It was only a minority of British new left supporters who ever seriously thought in terms of starting a new political party. Nor did the British new left see left-wing unity as a major goal. Instead, it was a probing movement, taking up novel issues, drawing in new constituencies, questioning old shibboleths. France had an appeal I suspect because socialist politics were felt to be rather more sophisticated and influential there. France did, after all, support a well established and respected intellectual left.

The more urgent motivation for giving space to French politics was the war that the French army was fighting with national liberation forces in Algeria. ULR 2 carried a special feature on this theme, based on a collection of extracts from three French journals - Temps Modernes, Esprit, France Observateur - and the American journal Dissent.[2] This feature gave insight into the scale and the significance of the war in Algeria. It reported how 400,000 French troops were in combat with a rebel force of 30,000, despite rebel losses of 3,000 each month. It described how the French government fought to protect French interests

1. See Bourdet (1957).

2. ULR (1957). Material for this feature was prepared and translated by Tom Bird, Peggy Henderson, Charles Taylor, Ralph Samuel.

particularly in land ownership, whilst the rebels were struggling against the marginalisation of the Algerian people in a 'settler' colony. And it drew on the Algerian experience to show how French colonialism, under threat, resorted to systematised and generalised terror in a desperate bid to survive.

The authors of this feature made a strong case for the relevance of the war in Algeria for the British left. They did not foresee a military solution. Instead, they maintained that it was international resistance that halted colonial wars - and the left in Britain had a responsibility to make their resistance felt. They also feared that British colonialism could be equally terrible when threatened with opposition (which was happening in Kenya at this time). 'A more vigilant, more conscious more continuous, more active anti-colonialism is an urgent necessity for the British left', they wrote. (ULR 1957:4).

The next article on France that the Universities and Left Review carried followed the election of de Gaulle as President in May 1958, and traced the drift to the right in French politics both in domestic and foreign affairs. Here Ralph Samuel and Michael Segal dated the beginning of the drift to the right with the expulsion of Communist Party members from the three party coalition in 1947.[1] They went on to argue that anti-Communism in the cold war years had forced successive governments into alliances with the right, and the Communist Party into isolation and Stalinism.

Algeria, they argued, had played an important part in this drift to a corrupt politics, and to right-wing rule. Evoking 'the deepest, most

1. See Samuel and Segal (1958).

nationalist responses in the French people' (Samuel and Segal, 1958:6) and not just in the military leaders and politicians, Algeria had corrupted the whole of French society. Even left opposition had collapsed.

Samuel and Segal went on to describe how this right-wing nationalism had gained such a hold with the election of de Gaulle that the very future of democracy in France was under threat, and the left was too weak and acquiescent to put up an effective defence. The French Communist Pary, for all that it opposed the war in Algeria, and had won five million votes in the elections, was 'totally run down in its elan, in its membership, in its moral and political quality; (it was) a mechanism from which the motor had been removed'. (Ibid:8). They went on to give a very pointed analysis of the demise of the French Communist Party. As sharp for Stalinism in general as for French Stalinism in particular, it deserves to be quoted at length. 'Stalinized Communism', they stated, was formed when the working class movement was weak and under seige, and when the USSR was encircled. It compensated with

> "... its steel-like determination, its granite discipline, its total subordination of the individual militant to the Party monolith ... Stalinism did not simply create a vanguard to lead the workers' army. It moulded the minority Communist elite for the defence of the citadel; it imbued it with a siege mentality to meet the bitterest of repressions, the most savage of tortures, to hold the most isolated of positions with the most unfavourable battles. The Party was to move with the rhythm of an army: it had to if it was to survive the perils of the campaign. And so its cadres, like those of the military, were deprived of all spontaneity, of all powers of initiative, of all means of participating in decision making ...

These cadres and militants, by the 1950s, had lost contact with reality in France. The militant was described in stark terms. By 1947,

> "... the militant had grown older, and as he grew older so he grew still more bitter. The mood of hate - hatred of the Americans, hatred of the bourgeois, hatred of the socialists, hatred of the Titoists - welled up until finally it overpowered all his other Communist emotions. When the staggering blow of the Twentieth Congress was followed so soon by the Hungarian repression, his horizcns narrowed still further. He could no longer even attempt a world view; he could no longer try to fit the facts of his politics to some image and ideal of the Communist Society. All his certainties had been eroded: all that remained was The Party, looming ever more mightily in his political thinking." (Ibid:8).

The election of de Gaulle was seen as posing a very serious threat to the future of the left in France, and ultimately in Britain too. The Universities and Left Review club decided to do what they could to make this threat known, and organised a public meeting, at which speakers not only from France, but from Hungary and from Germany, analysed the political changes that Europe was living through. The letter that was sent out to club members advertising this meeting gave a clear sense of how seriously they viewed the situation. 'For two months now we have been witness to the disastrous slide into a second cold war'.[1] Hungary, France, Poland and West Germany (where nuclear weapons might be installed) all demonstrated

> "the way in which democracy all over Europe is being suffocated by the old military and political elites. And all the time, the maintenance by both East and West of 'instant preparedness' places the very existence of Europe at the disposal of the military".[2]

It gave a clear sense too of the urgent need for British socialists to protest.

> "European democracy will not be able to survive if the pressures of the new cold war and of the new authoritarians who are its executors, continue to close in. This is <u>our</u> tragedy and it is <u>our</u> responsibility ... We think it is urgent for the British left to recognise its involvement in what is happening in Europe, to recognise its responsibilities and its solidarity with European democrats in their time of danger." 3

This belief that it was 'our tragedy', 'our responsibiity' was the strongest thread in the <u>Universities and Left Review's</u> coverage of international themes. It did not carry detailed analyses of the historical development or internal politics of other nation states. Instead, it combined a brief summary of a particular crisis with a call to action by socialists here. The sense of

1. Mimeographed letter to ULR club members from Ralph Samuel and Michael Segal, dated 8.7.58.

2. As above.

3. As above.

responsibility on which this call to action was based came across clearly in the articles the Universities and Left Review carried on decolonisation struggles. In its writing on Africa, as on France and Algeria, the Universities and Left Review put across a sense of direct implication, and of real concern.

## Colonialism

Aware of their implication, as British socialists, in the injustices that had come from British rule, Universities and Left Review writers and supporters did think seriously about what action they could take to help foster democracy and independence. It was the Universities and Left Review club, more than the journal that gave space to learning about the conditions of life and the struggles for liberation in the distant reaches of the colonial world. Political changes in countries as far apart as Africa, Cyprus, Indonesia and the Lebanon were discussed by the club, and by speakers as diverse as Doris Lessing,[1] Peter Worsley,[2] Basil Davidson,[3] James Callaghan,[4] Hussein Hallak[5]. Unfortunately very few of these speakers published articles in the journal, leaving us with no detailed account of the content of their talks.

1. Doris Lessing spoke to the ULR club on 'Africa' on 13.6.58.

2. Peter Worsley and Doris Lessing spoke to the ULR club on 'Crisis in Africa' on 21.4.58.

3. Basil Davidson spoke to the ULR club on 'African Nationalism Today' on 13.6.57.

4. James Callaghan spoke to London schools left club on 'North Rhodesia' on 1.12.58.

5. Hussein Hallek spoke to the London left club on 'Lebanon and the Cold War' on 19.6.58.

The journal carried only a few articles on colonialism and de-colonisation struggles. The first of these, on Africa, made the case that the time had come for socialists to look again at nationalism and its place in struggles for democracy and independence. Nationalism was seen as a growing force in Africa as a whole, both reflecting and transcending the imperialist pattern of rule.[1] This was reiterated by John Rex in the second article that the journal printed on Africa, all of two years later.[2] Here, Rex told how the latest wave of repression had passed unnoticed, despite its severity. As a result, young people on the left in Britain were not outraged about events in Rhodesia for example, because they knew so little about them. If they knew more, he implied, they would be moved to protest.

John Rex went on to describe what a long-term policy for democratic socialism in Africa would look alike, arguing that the Labour Party should adopt such a policy, and campaign around it. He argued too that democracy in Africa should be part of the Labour Party's 1959 election campaign. Labour, as we know lost this election. As the need to support decolonisation, particularly in Africa, grew in importance over 1960 and 1961, an alternative way of expressing support had to be found. The new left was weak here. Despite its awareness, and its sense of responsibility, for colonialism,it failed to generate an active campaign against it. To the disappointment of some new left supporters, such as John Rex, the movement was overwhelming preoccupied with politics in Britain.[3]

1. See Basil Davidson (1957).

2. See Rex (1959). Other articles the ULR published on colonialism and struggles for independence included M.Hasan, (1958); Gordon Marr (1959); Robert Bannard (1957).

3. John Rex (interview).

# CHAPTER 9

THE NEW REASONER: 'A QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF SOCIALIST HUMANISM'.[1]

In the last issue of the Reasoner, John Saville and Edward Thompson promised to 'consult with others about the formation of a new Socialist journal', (Editorial, Reasoner 3). This promise was hastily made in a last minute editorial, agreed on by telephone after a night of frantic work to bring the Reasoner up to date with events in Hungary.[2] They had little idea, in those tumultuous days, of quite what this new journal would be. But over several months of lengthy and wide-ranging discussions in Yorkshire and in London, a commitment to produce 'a journal of socialist humanism' took form. These people - potential contributors, editorial board members, administrators, supporters - included Yorkshire based academics and trade-unionists: Harry Hanson; Peter Mann; Frank Muir; Jim Roche; Joseph Greenald; Dorothy Greenald; and more widely spread editorial people: Doris Lessing and Malcolm MacEwen who were based in London: Randall Swingler in Essex; Constance Saville, John Saville and Peter Worsley in Hull; and Dorothy Thompson, Edward Thompson, and Alfred Dressler in Leeds. They drew much encouragement from the many Reasoner readers who wrote and urged them to produce another journal.[3] In the summer of 1957, the first issue of the New Reasoner appeared.

The New Reasoner had a very large potential audience from Ex Communist Party members alone. Over the six months from November 1956 to May 1957, the British Communist Party's leadership's support for the Soviet invasion of Hungary, following on the heels of its failure to examine the implications of the twentieth congress, was driving many members

1. Subtitle of the New Reasoner.
2. John Saville (interview)
3. Dorothy Thompson (interview).

to leave.[1] The New Reasoner tried to offer something to all those CP members who had finally 'had enough'.[2] It hoped to provide some inspiration for all those, both from the Communist Party and elsewhere, who were faced with the painful task of reassessing their socialist commitment. 'If Hungary hadn't come, we would have undoubtedly stayed in', recalled John Saville of himself and Edward Thompson, (interview). But instead and unhappily, they and eight thousand others felt compelled to leave making a break with a life and with loyalties that had been built up over many difficult years. Luckily, commented John Saville, 'we were both young enough to be aware of the possibilities which existed if you were outside the Communist Party, given that the development of creative work was no longer possible, as we saw it, in the CP'. (Interview).

Two Reasoner people, Malcolm MacEwen and Christopher Hill, did stay in the Communist Party a little longer in order to participate in the Commission on Inner Party Democracy. They broke with the majority on the commission and produced the Minority Report which, as we have seen, was rejected firstly by the party's executive, and subsequently by the 1957 congress. When the party rejected the democratisation that they had pressed for but far from expected, they too resigned, and gave their support to the New Reasoner.[3]

The New Reasoner was a quarterly journal of around one hundred and forty pages, 5¼" x 8½" in size, with a circulation of two thousand, and a readership probably three times that. Produced by a 'fairly close and comradely

1. Between February 1956 and February 1957, CP membership dropped from 33,095 to 26,742, and by February 1958 it was as low as 24,670. See Pelling (1975:192-3)

2. From Editorial, NR 3, 1957-8, winter.

3. Dorothy Thompson (interview) recounted how Christopher Hill had written to her when she, Edward Thompson and John Saville left the CP, to say that he expected that they would be back together in the spring.

group of people' who 'felt their way' through giving their time and energy to working together,[1] the New Reasoner was a considerable success. It was edited jointly by Edward Thompson and John Saville, who worked at the beginning with an editorial group of four ex CP members: Doris Lessing, the novelist, Randall Swingler, who had edited the CP's literary journal Arena in the late 1940s, and Ronald Meek and Ken Alexander, both economists. By the time that the second issue came out, two more people, both ex Communist Party members had joined the editorial board. These were Malcolm MacEwen, one of the authors of the Minority Report on the Commission for Inner Party Democracy,[2] and Derek Kartun who had spent eleven years on the staff of the Daily Worker. (He had had a relatively ignoble past in the CP, publishing a book damning Tito in 1949).[3] Derek Kartun was a relatively short-lived board member, leaving in less than a year. By issue 5, Peter Worsley who had been in the Communist Party at Cambridge with Dorothy Thompson, Edward Thompson and Raymond Williams, and Alfred Dressler another ex CP member who lectured in Russian at Leeds University had both joined the editorial board. By issue 7, Peter Worsley had become a joint editor with Edward Thompson and John Saville.

In issue 7, the New Reasoner credited its administrative team of Dorothy Greenald; Joseph Greenald (treasurer); Joan Knott (foreign department); Dorothy Thompson; Joan Welton; Sheila Worsley (five women and one man). By issue 8, the editorial board was expanded again. Two more ex Communist Party members were taken on. These were a scientist, Don Arnott, and Michael Barratt-Brown, an economist. Michael Barratt-Brown became the New Reasoner's'interlocking editor' with the Universities and Left Review whose board he joined at the same time. And two non CP members, Mervyn Jones, a novelist who worked for Tribune, and Ralph Miliband, a political

1. Dorothy Thompson (interview).
2. See CP (1957)
3. See Kartun (1949).

theorist and historian, also joined the board.

Edward Thompson recalled that the administration of the journal was carried out in this way:

> "Most of the editorial work was concentrated with me at Halifax; individual subscriptions with Dorothy, bulk orders were dealt with I think partly from Hull and partly from friends of ours in Spen Valley, but a great deal of activity, like fundraising and so on was going on from Hull, so it was a Hull-Halifax-Spen Valley operation ... But this (the journal) was only the top part of the iceberg. There was an amazing amount of correspondence going on. Advisory committees were being formed. We had a very good East European Advisory Committee which was convened by Alfred Dressler and we attempted to form an Industrial Committee which Jim Roche was associated with, and John Saville, Eric Heffer, I think even Stan Orme at one point, and others ... And then there were endless other kinds of political discussion going on." (Interview).

This work was very heavy going. '...our backs are against the wall. We have never told you quite how tough it has been to keep going during the past 18 months' the editors stated in 'Letter to Our Readers', NR 6:139. 'We were really stretched to our limits', recalled John Saville (interview), so much so that they had limited time to promote the discussion of ideas that they very much favoured.

As one way of gaining a sense of audience, and of getting some feedback, the editors often invited readers to send in 'criticisms, likes and dislikes, and ideas'[1]. They did not envisage - and were, in the beginning, somewhat ambivalent to - the setting up of discussion groups outside the 'mainstream' of the labour movement. It was, I think the Communist Party notion of the labour movement, comprising the Labour Party, the Communist Party and the trade union movement that was being used here. The editors hoped that the ideas and concerns of their journal would be taken seriously in the labour movement, and gain ground there. They believed that the analysis the journal carried could be the first step in reuniting a fragmented left.[2]

1 New Reasoner (1958) 'Letter to Our Readersp, NR 5:130.

2. See Editorial, NR 3(1957-8) and 'Letter to Our Readers', NR 4 (1958) for example.

The editorial of the first issue expressed the editors' commitment to the revival of political ideas in the labour movement particularly clearly:

> "Forty years of desperate emergencies, wars, and factional conflicts have reduced the creative body of ideas once known as "Marxism" to the state orthodoxy of "Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism" on the one hand, and to its stunted opposite, dogmatic Trotskyism, on the other. But revulsion against these orthodoxies has strengthened the traditionally pragmatic and anti-theoretical bias of the British labour movement, and has narrowed its internationalist outlook and diminished its revolutionary perspectives ... "
>
> The energies of the labour movement have been weakened by the sapping of links between socialist intellectuals and those who bear the brunt of the practical work of the movement.
>
> The New Reasoner hopes to make some contribution towards re-establishing these links and regenerating these energies. In the political field, we take our stand with those workers and intellectuals in the Soviet Union and E. Europe who are fighting for that return to Communist principle and that extension of liberties which has been dubbed 'de-Stalinisation', in Britain with those socialists on the left wing of the Labour Party, or unattached to any party, who are fighting under very different conditions, for a similar re-birth of principle within the movement. We have no desire to break impetuously with the Marxist and Communist tradition in Britain. On the contrary, we believe that this tradition, which stems from such men as William Morris and Tom Mann, and which later found expression in the cultural field, in such journals as Left Review and Modern Quarterly is in need of rediscovery and re-affirmation. It is our hope that we may be able to build some bridge between this tradition and those left socialists who - in the era of Stalin's birthday and the Doctors' Plot - developed their thought altogether outside it." (Editorial, NR 1:2).

By carrying theoretical articles, international material and creative writing, the New Reasoner was attempting to undo the damage that had been done to marxist ideas. Stalinism, in particular, was seen as being responsible for reducing marxism to the 'shrivelled mass of desiccated formulae'[1] that so many people saw it as being. '... most Marxists in the world became enmeshed in Stalinism and infected with its dishonesties, its lies and its half truths' wrote John Saville (1957:78). Most had conformed with the substitution of 'the smooth formulation for the gritty complexity of the real world', (Saville, 1957:78). One cost of this, Saville argued, was a failure to analyse contemporary society, especially post 1945. In the face of full

1. Saville (1957-79), quoting Tawney.

employment, marxists had continued to predict that crisis was imminent; as novel struggles for independence gathered momentum in the colonial world, marxists had stuck to a dogmatic theory of imperialism. It was hardly surprising, he concluded, that marxism had become increasingly marginal in the British labour movement and that 'revisionist' ideas had taken hold.

Implicit in John Saville's analysis of the demise of marxism in capitalist countries was the damage done by the containment of marxism within Communist Parties, and hence its overly Soviet orientation. The New Reasoner hoped to change this: it hoped to revive a British marxism that was responsive to the work of 'dissidents' in the East and the West, and relevant to post-war British society. The journal attempted to do this in a variety of ways. It published work on people - from Harold Laski[1] to William Blake[2] to G.D.H.Cole[3] to the early Marx[4] - all of whom, the editors felt, had a great deal to offer a regeneration of a'socialist humanist' marxism in Britain. It published work too on foreign thinkers, such as Antonio Gramsci,[5] Imry Nagy,[6] even Bartok,[7] from whom British socialists could, they felt, learn a great deal. It published a range of writing on

1. Stephen Hatch (1957). He argued here that Laski had shed more light on the relationship between socialism and liberty than any other writer.

2. New Reasoner 3 (1957-8) carried a special 'William Blake Bicentenary Supplement' in which several of Blake's etchings, some quotes and a poem were published.

3. See Kingsley Martin and Asa Briggs (1959).

4. See Kenneth Muir (1957-8); Christopher Hill (1958b); Ronald Meek(1959). Meek's article was a review of Marx's 1844 Manuscripts on their publication in English.

5. See Peter Worsley (1959); Christopher Hill (1958a); Antonio Gramsci (1959).

6. Imre Nagy (1958). This statement by Nagy was made in the autumn of 1955, and was published by the New Reasoner on his execution.

7.. See Gyula Illyes (1958).

de-colonisation movements (John Rex's writing on Africa stands out particularly here).[1] It published creative writing and art work. And it took on the task that, as John Saville had noted, contemporary marxism had failed to carry through, the task of analysing the economic and political changes that Britain had undergone since the war. By bringing together 'the techniques of scientist, artist, and economist, with the creative initiatives of the people', (Editorial, NR 3:3) the New Reasoner hoped to win the hearts and minds of British people for socialism, as we shall see, for peace.[2] (And it tried to avoid meanwhile a discussion of party politics, beset as they still were with 'bad blood', 'personal antagonism' and ' rancorous feeling') (Editorial NR 5:2)

There were major absences in New Reasoner writing. Despite the journal's intention to move beyond 'desiccated formulae' and encompass 'the gritty complexity of the real world', it did not move beyond a male-centred view of social and political life. It remained silent on the place of gender in socialist politics and indeed in society as a whole; it barely considered the modern family. Neither the analysis the journal carried on the workings of democracy in the trade unions and the Labour Party, nor its examination of welfare provision showed up the very sharp gender divisions in the social relations of the day. For New Reasoner writers (as for the majority of Labour Party and Communist Party theorists), waged work was essentially man's work, whilst domestic tasks, from childbearing to shopping, were women's 'unpolitical' concerns.

The first issue of the New Reasoner was almost entirely devoted to communist history. This was an attempt to clear the air, to come to terms with the past so that the future could be faced with new resolve.

1. See John Rex (1957; 1958a; 1959a,b).

2 See Editorial, New Reasoner 3,(1957-8) where the link between socialism and peace was clearly made.

Many of the writers in this issue shared Edward Thompson's depiction of 1956 as a 'year of hope',[1] and maintained like him, that events in Poland and Hungary were evidence that the communist 'spirit' had survived corrupt and bureaucratic rule.

> "The workers, students and intellectuals of Poland and Hungary, by their actions in recent months have shown that they have not lost the vision given to them by Blake, Marx, Engels, Morris, Lenin, Plekanov, Gorki, Lukacs and others, but are ready to give their lives to make that vision a reality."

wrote Bernard Stephens (1957:29). On Hungary, Peter Fryer argued that the revolution

> "... was a people's revolution, aimed, not at restoring the rule of landowners and Horthyites, but at overthrowing the tyrannical rule of a 'Communist' aristocracy and its hired thugs, and so establishing Socialist democracy."(Fryer, 1957:71).

And he argued too that the people who had carried through this revolution were communists, for 'it had been a political revolution, to throw off a despotic ruling caste, not a social revolution, to change the property relations, the economic structure of society'. (Fryer, 1959:74).

This belief that a genuine communism had survived, and was breaking through Stalinist repression, was further substantiated by the growth of a dissident culture. This was seen as a key indication of the health and the prospects for liberalisation in communist countries, and the New Reasoner carried a few reports on how this was faring.[2] They published, in addition, two pieces of creative writing in translation. The first of these was a short story by Tibor Dery entitled 'Behind the Brick Wall'.[3] This was a sympathetic

1. New Reasoner 1 writers included Bernard Stephens (1957); Jerry Dawson (1957); Jean-Paul Sartre (1957); Hyman Levy (1957); Peter Fryer (1957); Leonard Hussey (1957); Malcolm MacEwen (1957).

2. These were Jerry Dawson (1957); Bernard Stephens (1957). Articles on this theme in later issues included Iris Murdoch (1958-9) and Dora Scarlett (1958).

3. See Dery (1957).

account of a Hungarian worker's response to pilfering in the factory where he worked, pilfering that was taking place on a large scale because of the inadequate wages that workers earned there. Written in 1955, it had not passed the censors till August 1956. The second was a poem by a Pole, Adam Wazyk.[1] Unpublished, again, till the later months of 1956, this poem was a searing attack on the medieval ideas and inhuman acts of 'the bureaucrats'. In later issues, readers were urged to do what they could to show their solidarity with dissidents in the East, in the hope both of helping their case, and of fostering a genuine and principled unity within the socialist movement, East and West.

This link between the struggle for socialism in the communist and capitalist world was very important to the New Reasoner. Unlike the Universities and Left Review, the New Reasoner did believe that links could and should be made. Links were made too at the level of theory, since the 'lessons' of Stalinism were seen as lessons for socialists everywhere. Working for socialism in Britain could only be aided by an awareness of the pitfalls that had been encountered elsewhere.

## Socialist Humanism

The theme of socialist humanism drew together these different threads. It was through socialist humanism that ex CP members close to the New Reasoner attempted to purge themselves, their ideas, their politics, from the effects of Stalinism. By placing human agency at the centre of historical change, moral reasoning, moral choices - and individual responsibility - were returned to political thought and action. Edward Thompson in 'Socialist Humanism' (New Reasoner 1)[2], developed this theme at length. Drawing a great deal on William Morris, he considered the moral and political lessons of Stalinism,

1. See Wazyk (1957).

2. See Edward Thompson (1957c).

and attempted to clarify the road ahead. He relied, still, on some Communist Party formulations. He held to a version of the 'inevitability' theory that the CP held dear, describing capitalism as a 'dying order', and predicting that a 'period of transition' was nigh. He couched his rejection of Stalinism in terms of 'truth' and 'falsehood', arguing that Stalinism was a 'false' ideology, and of necessity doomed. It was his view that there was nothing inevitable about the form that this new society would take that set him apart from Communist Party thought.

The belief in human agency was at the heart of Edward Thompson's reassessment of Stalinism. Firstly, this involved <u>intellectual</u> autonomy, with Thompson arguing that thought was so much a part of human life that no repressive system could ever completely control or repress people's ideas. He described Stalinism as a false ideology because it had no place for ideas. Unable to provide a 'true' understanding of the societies in which it was dominant, and having 'outlived the social context in which it arose' (Thompson 1957c:108), Stalinism, Thompson argued, was bound to be overthrown.

Edward Thompson's depiction of Stalinism as a doomed ideology drew both on Marx and on Morris. He saw Stalin's 'economic automatism' as anathema to Marx's understanding of people as thinking and creative beings, reflective of their labour and their experience. It reified a mechanical, and hence erroneous view of the primacy of the economic base, misunderstanding the nature of human activity, and repressing everything that its stunted philosophy could not explain or control. Under Stalinism,

> "The creative act by which men, themselves the product of their circumstances, change these circumstances in their turn, and thus change themselves, was impeded by a false consciousness buttressed by the organs of the state and involving a falsification of historical evidence upon a gigantic scale." (Thompson 1957c:114-5).

Creative and independent thought had been brutally suppressed - and the 'false, warped, fragmentary ideas' of Stalinism left 'their evidence in the thronged

corpses, the barbed-wire encampments, economic dislocation and international conflict' (Ibid:115). Surely, Thompson argued, Stalinism itself could teach us what Stalin consistently denied: that ideas are 'real and material forces within society'.

> "We re-learn (what Marx surely understood) that man is human by virtue of his culture, the transmission of experience from generation to generation; that his history is the record of his struggle to truly apprehend his own social existence; and that Marx and Engels, through their discoveries, hoped to assist in the liberation of men from false, partial, class consciousness, thereby liberating them from victimhood to blind economic causation, and extending immeasureably the region of their choice and conscious agency." (Thompson, 1957c:115).

This denial of the importance of ideas in all human activity was not the only 'falsehood' of Stalinism that Thompson described. It denied too - and here Morris, more than Marx was his mentor - the place of the moral in human life. Thompson was arguing here that people possess a 'moral consciousness' with which the world is judged. In opposition to the 'moral nihilism' of Stalinism, Thompson gave voice to a humanist morality that neither reserved judgement on the numerous acts of persecution under Stalin's rule, nor identified morality with 'the interests of the working class'. Although he maintained that Marx and Engels had not been moral nihilists either, Thompson turned to Morris to develop this view.

Thompson described the moral response to Stalinism with force. Writing of the Stalinist purges, he stated:

> "No amount of speculation upon the intention or outcome can mitigate the horror of the scene. Those moral values which people have created in their history, which the writers have encompassed in their poems and plays, come into judgement on the proceedings. As we watch the counsel for the defence spin out his hypocrisies, the gorge rises, and those archetypes of treachery, in literature and popular myth, from Judas to Iago, pass before our eyes. The fourteenth century ballad singer would have known this thing was wrong. The Bulgarian peasant, who recalls that Kostov and Chervenkov had eaten together the bread and salt of comradeship, knows it is wrong. Only the 'Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist' thinks it was - a mistake." (Thompson, 1957c:119).

And he integrated morality into his view of communism. The 'end' of communism, he wrote, 'is an economic, intellectual, and moral end; the conscious fight for moral principle must enter into every 'political' decision; a moral end can only be attained by moral means. (Ibid:125-6).

Thompson maintained that both intellectual and moral reasoning had survived Stalinist repression. In communist countries, people were taking an active and moral stand. Indeed he concluded (with great optimism) that the revolt against Stalinism showed how

> "The fundamental moral consciousness of the people is unimpaired; the aspirations from which the socialist movement sprang grow stronger, not weaker," (Ibid:126):

socialist humanism had gained a new lease of life. And in Britain, he believed that 'the working people of Britain could end capitalism tomorrow', (Ibid:141) if the courage and the determination could be found.

Thompson concluded by discussing what socialists in non communist countries should do to further de-Stalinisation there. With the claim that Stalinism was only held in power by 'fear of war with the West', Thompson spelt out two separate but connected tasks:

> "We must understand - and explain - the true character of Stalinism, the new face of Soviet society imminent within it. We must do what we can to dismantle the Hydrogen Bomb."(Ibid:138).

This second task, of nuclear disarmament, was argued for with ever greater force by Edward Thompson, and was connected, by him and other New Reasoner authors, to a demand for far-reaching change.

> "The bomb is like an image of man's whole predicament: it bears within it death and life, total destruction or human mastery over human history. Only if men by their own human agency can master this thing will Marx's optimism be confirmed, and 'human progress cease to resemble that hideous pagan idol, who would not drink the nectar but from the skulls of the slain',"

he wrote. (Ibid:143). He was expressing here the view shared by the early new left that the bomb was 'emblematic' of all social ills.

In subsequent issues of the New Reasoner, argument over the causes and the implications of Stalinism, discussion of socialist humanism and its relation to marxism, reappraisal of a British road to socialism and the campaign for nuclear disarmament all had their place. Authors differed on the implications of Stalinism, and were a long way from agreeing on the questions, for example, of whether Stalinism had been historically necessary, or on how far Stalinism should engender a revision of Marx. The New Reasoner editors were hopeful that the fact that this discussion was taking place at all marked the end of the dogmatic Communist Party marxism of the cold war years. And they did what they could to foster an open, responsive and eclectic marxist tradition, a tradition in which Blake and Morris could stand beside Marx, Engels and Lenin. But the desire for an open tradition could not of itself mark the end of dogma. Often, the differences between pieces of writing that they published boded ill for the creation of any common ground (as did the response of Edward Thompson to his critics). The debate that took place was far from undogmatic in tone, with writers seeking to assert the rightness of their case, and the error of their opponent's.

The most sober assessment of the prospects for change in the communist movement, East and West, was written by the scientist Hyman Levy. In an article entitled 'Soviet Socialism', also published in New Reasoner 1, Levy emphasised the importance of recognising the particularity of socialism in any country, he emphasised the need for a 'British Road to British Socialism' here. (Levy 1957:5). Hyman Levy as we know had been profoundly shocked to discover the full extent of Stalinist repression: his writing for the New Reasoner was as anguished as his writing for the Universities and Left Review. He described his horror, his despair, his

pain, at the Krushchev revelations, and arqued that understanding Stalinism should never mute abhorrence of it.

Levy then shared Thompson's belief in the salience of moral reasoning. He shared too, the view that socialists had to make an independent stand against injustice and for socialism, working with local history local traditions, local institutions, and without capitulating to external control.

The New Reasoner carried a number of articles addressing Edward Thompson's 'Socialist Humanism'. Harry Hanson,[1] a 'sceptic', who had left the Communist Party in 1953, and Charles Taylor,[2] a 'humanist', who, as we know, had never been in the CP, both contested whether humanism was part of the marxist tradition. The marxist ethic, in Hanson's eyes, was not 'humanist' but 'futurist', since human values could never be realised in the here and now. He believed that 'scientific socialism' and 'socialist humanism' could never be bridged. Charles Taylor maintained that the humanism of 'Marxist Communism' (a term that illustrates how closely marxism was identified with the Communist Party in those years) was, at best, incomplete. He argued that marxism's inadequacies had made Stalinism possible. It was the notion of a 'class conditioned' morality that particularly concerned him. Marx's notion that it was the historic mission of the working class to create socialism had enabled the party, the 'conscious wing' of the working class, to believe that it could conceive what the mission of the working class was. Hence the ground was laid, by Marx, for the Stalinist identification of the proletariat with the party, and for the personification of the 'vanguard' in the figure of Stalin himself. Taylor concluded that to Marx's 'proletarian imperative should be added a further 'socialist humanist' imperative, that no-one

1. See Harry Hanson (1957; 1959), and Mervyn Jones (1959).

2. Charles Taylor (1957b).

be deprived of their status as human beings in pursuit of freedom. It was the duty of humanists to protect the essential value of everyone, irrespective of their individual actions or their class position.

Two 'marxist' authors responded to Edward Thompson's article by defending the adequacy of marxist theory as it stood. One, Jack Lindsay,[1] stressed the importance of the dialectic. Another, Tim Enright,[2] saw no problems with the line of descent from Marx to Lenin to Stalin. He charged Thompson with making idealist criticisms of materialism in practice, and was prepared to risk being called a Stalinist to defend the advances that Soviet socialism had made.

In future issues, this debate on the place of morality in communist history and socialist politics continued. Edward Thompson answered his critics in 'Agency and Choice', <u>New Reasoner</u>5[3]. There, he described the denial of moral and intellectual agency as 'philistine'. 'Historical necessity' in the communist world, and the pressure of expediency in the 'social-democractic' West, were both evidence in his eyes, of how pervasive this 'philistinism' was. But Thompson's confidence that 'socialist humanist' movemements were growing, and that people (by becoming involved in CND for example) were acting as conscious agents for change, could not answer the question of the relationship between communist history and political theory and morality that '1956' had posed so sharply. Thompson attempted to answer this with the claim that a 'language of moral choice' was a necessity in politics, moving now to the view that Charles Taylor held, that marxist humanism was itself incomplete.

Whilst Thompson was an eloquent spokesperson for the importance of morality, he did not provide his readers with a cogent analysis of whence the moral

1. See Lindsay (1957-8).
2. See Tim Enright (1957-8)
3. See Thompson (1958).

was derived. The closest he came to this was a brief passage in 'Socialist Humanism' where he stated, somewhat opaquely, that

> "... moral judgements cannot be derived from abstract precepts and commandments, but only from real men and women, their suffering or well-being, frustrations and aspirations ... What does one judge with? One judges as a moral being: one responds with one's moral consciousness, itself the product of environment, of culture and of agency. This is to say that moral judgements are never easy; because they are not abstractions, but are concerned with real men and women, they are as difficult as life." (Thompson, 1957c:125).

Alasdair MacIntyre, a philosopher, volunteered himself for the task of theorising the moral. In two articles in 'Notes from the Moral Wilderness - 1 and 2' in New Reasoner 7 and 8[1] he attempted to map out a moral position that was based in history but not subservient to it. He ctiticised the 'liberal' critics of Stalinism on the grounds that they had come to believe, mistakenly, that moral principles were beyond historical experience and rational justification. He rejected Stalinist morality on the grounds that it left no place for the moral at all. And he criticised the 'revisionism' of thinkers such as Kolakowski on the grounds that they attempted to 'revive the moral content within Marxism by simply taking a Stalinist view of historical development and adding liberal morality to it'. They left the 'gulf between morality and history, between value and fact as wide as ever'. (MacIntyre, 1958-9:93).

MacIntyre gave an historical account of the process whereby, in liberal thought, the moral had become separated from human experience. He traced how 'morality' had alienated and thwarted human desire, and argued that we need a new morality which would both order and articulate our desires. As with Edward Thompson, the concept of human action was fundamental to MacIntyre's understanding of the past, and his vision of the future.

1. See MacIntyre (1958-9; 1959).

This concept, that people, albeit within real constraints and with limited understanding, do make their own history belied a mechanical view of the relationship between base and superstructure. And it necessitated an open and undogmatic attitude to theory, since it was through creative action that societies, and our understanding of them, were changed.

MacIntyre developed his case by drawing on his understanding of Marx's view of human nature. He argued that history, for Marx, was the history of class struggle. It was the history of people through collective action rediscovering 'the deeper desire to share what is common in humanity' (MacIntyre, 1959:95), and realising their potential. The growth in productivity and the experience of working class solidarity under capitalism had made it possible for 'man to reappropriate his own nature, for actual human beings to realise the richness of human possibility'. (Ibid: 95). through working together to build socialism, 'desire' and 'morality' could meet, and people would discover shared desires. Desires (or morality) were not simply chosen, as the liberal would argue, or synonomous with historical 'laws', as the Stalinist believed. It was in the making of history that 'morality' lay.

These conclusions, strikingly similar to Edward Thompson's had not moved far beyond him. Alasdair MacIntyre, well aware that he had achieved little at the level of theory, ended by noting that it was 'moral vision', and not philosophy, that was important now: 'that, and not any amount of analysis, is what will lead us out of the moral wilderness'. (Ibid:98)

'Moral vision', and analysis, were not so sharply delineated in other writing the New Reasoner carried. One project the journal had set itself was to analyse the economic and political changes that Britain had experienced since the Second World War. It carried a lengthy debate on this, with authors discussing both how far capitalism had changed, and the implications of these changes for socialism. It is to this debate that we will now turn.

"Beyond the Capitalist Crisis? British Capitalism, and the Prospects for Socialist Change."

John Saville's judgement that marxists had failed to provide 'essential clues to contemporary society' (Saville, 1957:78) through the cold war period was shared by several authors who attempted, in the pages of the review, to do just that. They offered quite varied analyses of the economic and political changes that Britain had gone through since the war, examining the very features of capitalism that had been enshrined by the Labour Party revisionists, and considering the implications of their findings for marxist theory. They discussed the significance of the growth in state activity, from the nationalised industries, to state investment to, of course, the provision of welfare. They examined the thesis that capitalism had entered a new, more public spirited, and more stable phase through the growth in state intervention on the one hand and the separation of ownership from managerial control on the other. And they seriously considered the policy implications of the conclusions they drew, suggesting socialist policies suitable, in their eyes, for adoption by the Labour Party.

But however far they had shared a common politics before 1956 (and not all writers had been Communist Party members), the authors that the New Reasoner published differed widely now. Traditional marxist analyses, on the nature of the capitalist state for example, were answered by writers who were more enamoured by the record, and the prospects, for reformism. And reformist plans, such as Ken Alexander and John Hughes' plan for a socialist wages policy, were printed alongside more orthodox denuciations. This range of opinion within one journal illustrated the editors' desire that socialists should discuss their points of difference, and develop their interests in divergent ways. The New Reasoner was not in the business of developing a new marxist orthodoxy now that the Communist Party's marxism had been found wanting. And although, as Edward Thompson recalled, some New Reasoner con-

tributors such as Ralph Miliband, and to a lesser extent John Saville, did think that the New Reasoner should build up a 'more clearly marxist tradition of theoretical work and analysis' (interview), the journal did not only do this. 'I don't think it is right to see one singular New Reasoner tradition' commented Edward Thompson (interview); and nor is it right to see a single marxist tradition in the journal's pages. Instead, it carried a range of writing on contemporary capitalism, including fairly traditional marxist, humanist and reformist perspectives.

The Communist Party's model of capitalism as a doomed, obsolete system, came in for serious reconsideration in the pages of the New Reasoner. The picture of evermore serious crises; of the concentration of economic ownership and control; of increasingly acute social tensions; of the state as a largely ineffective buffer to capitalism's immediate ills did not correspond particularly well to capitalism's apparent economic and political stability, and the growth of state power. And the fact that the state had grown, prompting some theorists to herald the birth of a 'mixed economy' did throw doubt on the historians' hypothesis that the transition from capitalism to socialism would be relatively brief and profound

> "For many years now Marxists have been talking about the monopoly stage in the development of capitalism. But in their efforts to analyse it they have been too much concerned with trying to prove that what Marx and Lenin said about it was true, and too little concerned with bringing their analysis up to date as years passed.
> ...
>
> An examination of capitalism in its present stage of development then, has as its necessary concomitant a critical re-examination of the principles of Marxist economics," (Ronald Meek, 1959a:41).

Now that marxism could be freed from its containment within the Communist Party the writers the New Reasoner published developed divergent understandings of what was essential and inessential in marxist thought.

The work of some 'bourgeois' economists was given serious attention in this attempt to re-work marxism. The challenge of the Labour Party revisionists, whose claim that a new 'statist' capitalism had rendered socialism 'out of date', was taken up in the pages of the review. Breaking with the Communist Party's practice of dismissing revisionist ideas, writers gave more serious thought to the growth of the state, the 'managerial revolution' thesis, the implications, for socialism, of 'affluence' and welfare. Those revisionists who were more critical of capitalism, such as John Strachey, were taken very seriously indeed.[1] Some writers drew up socialist policy proposals for the Labour Party. Others analysed how the failings of democratic procedures in the labour movement had blocked the adoption of radical ideas like their own.

By far the most thorough consideration of the theoretical implications of capitalism's current state and the revisionist challenge was undertaken by Ronald Meek, a member of the New Reasoner's editorial board. In three articles entitled 'Economics for the Age of Oligopoly' in New Reasoner 8, 9, 10,[2] he drew on both Marx and 'bourgeois economists', such as Strachey and Keynes, to 'formulate a new economic theory' for capitalism's latest stage of development. Meek touched on a whole range of economic questions in these three articles. From his comparison of Marx and Keynes he concluded that there was no guarantee that a large slump would not recur - in other words, he did not think that the pursuit of Keynesian policies had permanently insulated capitalism from crisis. He affirmed Marx's 'starting point' of 'the social-economic production relation between capital owners and wage earners'. He did

1. Ronald Meek (1959a). Other writers on the nature of contemporary capitalism and the politics of the Labour Party included Ralph Miliband (1958a;b); Peter Ibbotson (1958); John Rex (1958b).

2. See Meek (1959a, b, c).

recognise that capitalism had changed from Marx's day: with the growth of the 'oligopolies'; with the economic effects of state activity; with technological changes; and with working class activity directed more to increasing labour's 'real rewards' than to abolishing the system, capitalism had taken on a slightly different face. But, he argued, it was possible to theorise these changes in a marxist way. For various political reasons, marxists had, so far, largely failed to take up this challenging task. Now, he concluded, the time had come for them to do just that.

The New Reasoner did begin this task. It published a range of views on the nature of British capitalism, the role of the state, possibilities for reform and the politics of the Labour Party. Authors expressed divergent opinions both on the nature of capitalism and the road to socialism. The more traditional marxists, such as Ron Meek, Ralph Miliband, John Saville, emphasised the fundamental and primary need to dispossess the capitalist class (and considered Labour's record with this in mind). Others, such as Dorothy Thompson and Peter Worsley, focused on the need to generate socialist values, and others still drew up plans to gradually transform the political economy of capitalism. These differences were brought to light particularly well in the discussion of the state in capitalism.

None of the contributors who were closely identified with the New Reasoner argued as strongly as Michael Kidron that the state, under capitalism, was 'a class implement, fashioned specifically and exclusively for the rulers' (Kidron, 1959:86). Nonetheless, some were quite close to sharing this view. Both John Saville and Ralph Miliband supported a fairly traditional marxist view of the role of the state in capitalism. They both argued that state welfare provision served the interests of the capitalist class. Ralph Miliband maintained that state intervention, and indeed nationalisation

of basic utilities did this too.[1]

John Saville developed this argument that welfare provision served to stabilise capitalism by describing how property owners had come to realise that 'welfare' was 'the price that had to be paid for political security' (and enhanced productivity). They had then ensured that it was not them who had to find the cash. For the working class, welfare was primarily a 'self-help' system, in which it funded the services and benefits it received. Nonetheless, the working class movement had had to struggle long and hard to secure such a paradoxical end.

> "Only the massive development of the working class movement and the recourse to methods of direct action have been able to shift the mountains of unreason that have built themselves upon the foundations of private property." (Saville, 1957-8:10).

he wrote; the ruling class, by implication, have not always seen how their own interests could best be served.

This point - that the capitalist class has always resisted the changes that it perhaps unreasonably feared - was echoed too by Ralph Miliband. In what was a very damning analysis of the nature of social democracy. Miliband described how the capitalist class had resisted the growth of democratic institutions but then, provided the left was weak, had found ways of making them compatible with interests of its own.[3]

These very negative assessments of what had appeared to be left-wing advances posed very serious questions for the reformist road to change. These writers did not abandon reformism per se. Michael Kidron and the Socialist Labour League continued to support campaigns for reforms not

1. See Saville (1957-8) and Miliband (1958a).
2. See Miliband (1958a).

least because the experience of campaigning could raise the consciousness of the working class. And John Saville believed that some inroads into the workings of capitalism could be achieved, providing that the working class found the energy, the organisation, the determination to *insist* upon change. He was concerned that the working class had lost this; that it had become 'blunted in purpose'. And he called on socialists to provide a realistic appraisal of the way ahead.

Ralph Miliband was equally convinced that the current situation was a complex one, and that the struggle for socialism would be long and hard. He looked with extreme dismay at the reformist policies that the Labour Party had pursued. Indeed, his article, 'The Transition to the Transition', *New Reasoner* 6, was basically an account of the Labour Party's resistance to socialist change. Far from challenging capitalism, he maintained that Labour had worked to '*adjust* capitalist enterprise to the logic of its own development' (Miliband, 1958b:38). The notion that '*any* kind of State intervention, *any* degree of collectivism, represents an erosion of capitalism and must therefore be treated as an advance to socialism' (Miliband, 1958b:39), a notion that he believed to be 'deeply imbedded in Labour thinking' was, he maintained 'profoundly mistaken'. He thought that the Labour Party was becoming 'the neo-capitalist party *par excellence*' (Ibid:45): not only was the leadership anti-socialist, but a majority of the membership had lost interest in socialism too.

Miliband explained the currency of 'neo-capitalist' ideas, and the impotence and the unpopularity of the left by describing the pressure that the USA had exerted to undermine left-wing ideas. Looking ahead, he predicted that current trends would continue. We would not see the growth of socialist enclaves with capitalism, but the erosion of democracy in 'social democratic' states. Already, we were subjected to a state that

> "... has now a highly extensive internal spying system; it opens letters, taps telephones, denies passports, confiscates 'subversive' literature, dismisses its employees on suspicion of past, present and future 'disloyalty'; and much else besides ... There is no longer a qualitative break between liberalism and straightforward authoritarianism. As they say, it's all a matter of degree." (Miliband, 1958a:51).

But for all his condemnation of the Labour Party, Miliband still concluded that the labour movement was where socialists ought to be. Faced with the enormous tasks of analysing the complex forces at work in our society, and then of making socialists, the labour movement remained the forum where this work should be done. 'Now is the time to get in and push'. (Miliband, 1958b:48).

Quite what they were taking on in pressing for socialist policies in the labour movement in general and the Labour Party in particular was very graphically described by John Rex, a long-time Labour Party member.[1] He maintained that the bureaucratic structures both of the Labour Party and the trade unions had effectively served to marginalise the left. Nonetheless, if socialists devoted a great deal of time and effort to educating party members, and to pressing for socialist changes, he believed that they could reach a position of strength from which they could transform the structures themselves.

The vast majority of New Reasoner authors shared this commitment to working for socialism in and through the labour movement. It was only in the labour movement that they felt they had any prospect of influencing the one group that stood any chance of actually building socialism: the working class. Where they differed was in their assessment of the possibility of effecting even limited changes in the here and now.

1. See Rex (1959a).

Some writers, unlike John Saville, Michael Kidron, Ralph Miliband, did have rather more faith in reformism. They still held to the belief that it was possible to slowly gnaw away at capitalism, and to gradually dispossess the capitalist class. Several writers contested the view that the state, under capitalism, was merely in the service of the capitalist class. Dorothy Thompson defended the welfare services on the grounds that they were 'victories for working class values within capitalist society' (Thompson, 1958:128), and 'aspects of modern society which are in origin and in operation profoundly anti-capitalist', (Ibid:130). In the opinion of another writer, Stephen Hatch, welfare services, state investment, the nationalised industries, all 'facilitated' the 'transition to socialism'.[1] John Saville and Stephen Hatch differed profoundly on the strategy by which socialist advances could be made; they differed on the amount of agitation necessary to achieve legislative changes; and they differed on whether the changes that had been made were socialist advances at all. Dorothy Thompson disagreed with John Saville too.[2] Whilst she was careful to state that the provision of welfare had not altered property relations within British society or transformed capitalism, she still believed that it had made 'a very appreciable difference to the way of life of the British working class' (Thompson, 1958:127).

The welfare services she argued had come to 'constitute an objectively anti-capitalist force in society, (Ibid:129). They were not merely palliatives, but real gains, so much so that British was no longer 'purely' capitalist in the sense that marxists had wanted to insist.

> "New modes of production, new social relationships, new institutions and new values can always be seen growing within the old social and political framework (Ibid :128).

1. See Hatch (1958).

2. See Dorothy Thompson (1958). Other writers who emphasised socialist values when discussing welfare were John Marshall (1958-9) and Peter Smith (1958).

she wrote; and the growth of welfare represented just this.

Dorothy Thompson, in focusing on the values embodied in welfare provision, was applying humanist ideas to social analysis. She, and other 'humanist' writers differed from the more traditional marxists we have been considering in the importance they placed on socialist values. The traditional marxists, such as Miliband and Saville, were concerned to stress the primacy of the economic base, and although they did make humanist statements, these were not the focal messages of their accounts.

The New Reasoner editors drew these two themes of economic power and of socialist values together in a feature on 'Art and the Community' New Reasoner 6. There, they printed this description of contemporary culture:

> "The labour movement is a mere machine unless it is concerned with the quality of our social life. We can have a culture which condones megaton explosions, and within which racial riots fester; or we can have one which 'avails towards life'. As a matter of mere survival, the labour movement must fight for the priorities of life and against those of waste, competition, and destruction. It should fight more stubbornly, engendering a mood which sees it as intolerable that beautiful cities and adequate education and accessible art-values should be regarded as utopian luxuries, whilst nuclear weapons and Black Knight rockets and advertising wars are regarded as necessities. If the debasing influence of the mass media are to be successfully resisted, this can be done not by resolutions or by rhetorical perorations about the Sunday newspapers, but only by encouraging a true culture vital and enduring enough to drive the counterfeit out: and in this, the socialist and the artist are natural allies. This is, in fact - as the socialist pioneers believed - one of the first things that the labour movement is about. (New Reasoner 6:65).

They maintained that it was worthwhile to work for a 'true vital culture' within, and as a challenge to, capitalism.

In this issue, several writers drew up concrete proposals for art policy within the labour movement, and under a Labour Government. Hoggart's thesis that cultural values were being 'debased' by the growth of the mass media, was shared by several contributors to the journal. Concern was

expressed, too, at the corruptive effects of 'affluence', not only in undermining the will for socialist change, but also in threatening a sense of collective solidarity in the working class.

The prospects were not good, these socialists recognised, for a growth in radical and militant class struggle. Meanwhile, the theoretical question of the role of the state under capitalism, and the strategic one of the prospects of working towards socialism through legislative change, remained as important as ever. For how were any measures, from better welfare, to community art, to more nationalisation, to disarmament, going to win popular support in a period of growing personal affluence, and political acquiescence, under Conservative rule? And even if some new benefits were to be won from the system, how could these be made into socialist gains?

It was the more 'reformist' writers who gave the most confident answers to these questions. Several New Reasoner contributors drew up fairly detailed plans for what they considered to be socialist legislation. Nationalisation was one topic that they addressed. In New Reasoner 2 John Hughes, an economist, discussed the nationalisation of steel - a particularly topical concern since it was still part of Labour's programme.[1] Hughes described the unfortunate history of attempts to nationalise steel, documenting how neither the Labour Government nor the left as a whole had mobilised with anything like the necessary force to ensure that steel nationalisation got through. Hughes argued that the labour movement should learn from past failure: it should follow the example of the capitalist class, and take industrial action to secure political ends.

1. See Hughes (1957).

John Hughes' argument that it was the duty of socialists to devise plans so that nationalised industries would challenge private industry was not taken up by other contributors to the journal. Several did express their agreement with his view that nationalisation had not, so far, challenged private industry. Ken Alexander, a member of the New Reasoner board, wrote a review of Clive Jenkins' Power at the Top. He supported Jenkins' analysis of

> "... a planned and purposeful counter-revolution which has resulted in the return of active adherents of the older property-possessing groups and their social attitudes to direct management power in the nationalised industries." (Jenkins, quoted by Alexander, 1959:127).

Alexander did not take up here the question of further nationalisation, but he did discuss, with greater pessimism than Hughes, the questions of the decentralisation of power, and workers' control. And here, the New Reasoner's contribution to the nationalisation debate rested. Still the best way that the British labour movement had devised of dispossessing sections of the capitalist class, it had, so far, failed to undermine capital, on the one hand, or produce 'pockets' of socialist enterprise on the other. It could still go some way to achieving this; and the nationalisation of steel was a case in point. But to be successful (or so Hughes argued), socialists would have to research and theorise nationalisation, and the labour movement would have to gear itself for militant and united action, so that it could use, and not be compromised by, the parliamentary road to socialist change.

The New Reasoner also carried a discussion on a socialist wages policy, for implementation by a Labour Government. Ken Alexander and John Hughes drew up a proposal for this, and the New Reasoner and the Universities and Left Review published it jointly as a special booklet in 1959. The Socialist Wages Plan was the New Reasoner and the Universities and Left Review's

first joint venture, and it sold well. The New Reasoner's editors strongly urged their readers to buy and discuss it, and New Reasoner 10 carried a special 'polemic' around the case that Alexander and Hughes had made. Alexander and Hughes had intended, in the Socialist Wages Plan, to devise 'a radical social policy (which) would proble the limits of reform within capitalism, but strike hard at those points of private economic power which obstruct reforms that have democratic support'. (Alexander and Hughes, 1959a:7). They looked to the trade unions to develop and campaign for such a policy, in the belief that this amounted to the labour movement using the state for its own ends. The question they posed themselves was

> "... what are the wage and income distribution policies required in any attempt at a radical socialist solution to the economic and social problems of British capitalism in the 1960s; how far could more co-ordinated Trade Union policies strengthen the socialist (and anti-sectional) forces in the T.U.'s and reinforce social and political challenge to 'the system'? "(Alexander and Hughes, 1959b:92).

The ambiguity - of seeking a'radical socialist solution' to the problems of capitalism - was a very noticeable feature of the plan they devised.

Alexander and Hughes integrated their plan into a programme of economic growth. They argued that increased productivity and planned investment, coupled with a wages policy, could bring inflation under control and facilitate 'balanced' economic growth. This would, in turn, be of benefit to the working class, since it would secure the gradual redistribution of income in favour of 'the workers'; it would eradicate the time-lag between wage and price rises; it would lessen the threat of unemployment; it would mark an end to inter-union rivalry; and it would ensure a steady rise in wage levels, in excess of the rises that had been achieved in the post-war years. In short, Alexander and Hughes maintained that with a wages policy, the working class would be able to enjoy the fruits of increased economic efficiency and higher productivity that British industry,

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in their eyes, had to achieve. Such thinking was a long way removed from the 'crisis' orientation of the Communist Party. The CP's rejection of any attempt to find à 'middle way' out of crisis was rejected here in favour of a plan that was, on the face of it, very close to the social democratic policies that the CP had so vociferously rejected. It differed from social democratic policies because its authors intended not only to 'search for correct reformist tactics' (Alexander and Hughes, 1959b:150), but to probe the limits of reformism. They believed that the advances that reformist pressure could achieve were limited ones. At some point, capitalism would reach its 'sticking point', and concede nothing more. Then, a 'general revolutionary strategy' would be necessary to achieve further change. But before then, they saw plans such as theirs on wages as viable attempts to impose the 'political economy of the working class', undermining 'the total domination of decision-making by big business'. (Ibid:104).

Alexander and Hughes were two authors who appeared to have accommodated themselves to the idea that, not only had severe crises in capitalism become unlikely, but that socialists had an interest in avoiding them. Nor were they entirely alone in this. Several of their critics argued too for higher investment and productivity - i.e. for growth under capitalism, and one, H.A.Turner took them to task for not placing enough emphasis on this.[1] Meanwhile, other writers were rather more sceptical of the supposition that capitalism had moved beyond crisis. Capitalism's apparent stability, they argued, did not mean that the contradictions in the system had been superceded but that they were, in the short term, not being expressed. (And meanwhile, the election of de Gaulle in France showed

1. See Turner (1959).

that capital could still resort to extreme right-wing solutions should it feel itself to be under threat). No-one took up Hughes and Alexander on their assumption of male dominance, enshrined in the statement that 'the mass of the British working class want full employment (and their wives want stable prices)' (Alexander and Hughes, 1959b:102). Male power was not a topic that was discussed in the review. The strength of 1950s ideology on woman's place had left its impression even on writers who were consciously trying to push back the boundaries of socialist thought. In addition, women's experience very seldom made it onto the pages of the New Reasoner - an absence that must have been a product, in part, of the fact that male contributors outnumbered female contributors by ten to one.

One writer, Peter Worsley, (a sociologist), did point to the absences in social research which, if righted, might have made gender divisions a topic of concern. He argued that research was badly needed both into the power structure of contemporary Britain, and into 'the wider questions of value and ethic, of the quality of relationships which capitalism engenders and which we seek to replace by something better'. (Worsley, 1958:64). Peter Worsley's sensitivity to the absences in contemprary research is illustrated by this rare statement on the place of the family in social relations:

> "To understand the relevant processes at work involves looking at family life in its cyclical development - from birth to death, and through the generations - and always, too, within a specific historical context. For the forces which are shaping the working class family in Bethnal Green are at work on the families of bank clerks, businessmen, dockers and clergymen in Pontypridd, Dundee, Manchester and Plymouth ...
>
> Changes in Britain's balance of payments position, technological innovations in industry, liberation movements in the colonies, the Cold War - all these affect the structure of the family in this country. The latter does not constitute an entirely autonomous province of social life." (Worsley, 1958:58).

It was not an absence that the New Reasoner chose to pursue.

The New Reasoner and nuclear disarmament.

It was the New Reasoner, more than the Universities and Left Review, that took on the task of theorising nuclear disarmament. In editorials and in a range of articles, authors discussed the political and economic context of defence policy and disarmament. They discussed neutralism, withdrawal from NATO, 'peaceful co-existence': they wanted opposition to the H bomb to broaden, taking on the forces that had led to the strategy of nuclear 'defence'. Their contribution was to provide the labour movement with the analysis from which it could broaden its campaigns. They recognised, nonetheless, the enormous symbolic significance of the bomb. As Edward Thompson wrote in New Reasoner 1,

> "The bomb is like an image of man's whole predicament: it bears within it death and life, total destruction or human mastery over human history." (Thompson, 1957c:143).

The shared a sense of the urgency of protest with the thousands who had joined the CND. And they saw, in the nuclear disarmament movemement, the potential for 'socialist humanism' in practice - for a moral and active response to the deadly, and deadening policy of nuclear 'defence'.

Those authors who discussed the context of defence policy also produced plans for change. Some described the links between the cold war and nuclear proliferation, and discussed what British socialists, and a British Government, could do to lessen the tensions between West and East. More 'critical support' for the USSR was one measure that was suggested.[1] At the level of defence policy, 'neutrality for Britain' was the New Reasoner's theme. As a first step, this involved Britain's withdrawal from NATO, and New Reasoner authors obviously hoped that this would set

1. See Malcolm MacEwen (1958).

in motion the dismantling of the whole NATO alliance. NATO, they argued, was at the root of the continuing tension in Europe, and this tension, in turn, caused the arms race. NATO was responsible for

> "... the freezing of Europe into an aggressive and highly dangerous posture, with the worst arms race in history condemning her peoples to the evils of galloping inflation and jeopardising the very existence of future generations." ('Can we have a Neutral Britain?', NR 4:7).

The New Reasoner published various articles on the theme of neutrality. C. Rajagopalachari, President of the All-India Peace Council, drew from the experience of Indian independence to consider the attitude necessary to peaceful co-existence.[1] And Konni Zilliacus, who as we have seen was one of few Labour MP's to protest over Labour's foreign policies, wrote a very detailed article on what a socialist foreign policy for the Labour Party would be.[2] Zilliacus argued that the Labour Party must come to see Communism as 'a challenge and not a military threat', (Zilliacus 1958:29). He described how a British Labour Government could take a lead in disarmament, announcing 'a moratorium in the Cold War, through ceasing to manufacture H Bombs and forbidding the use of our territory for the flying of H Bomb planes, or launching of nuclear rockets'. (Zilliacus, 1958:37). This could pave the way for peace through international agreement. Zilliacus looked (still) to a more relevant, a more effective, and a more representative United Nations, as offering the best change of an internationally negotiated peace.

The New Reasoner also carried an article by G.D.H.Cole on what a socialist foreign policy would be. On many points he concurred with Zilliacus, though he called for rather more on one point: Britain, he argued, should make

1. See C.Rajapolachari (1958).
2. See Konni Zilliacus (1958).

> "... a real and sincere attempt to arrive at terms of friendship, and not merely of peaceful co-existence, with the Soviet Union, China, and the Communist satellites." (Cole, 1958:9).

What had become the New Reasoner's distinctive theme - the political and economic context of disarmament - was taken up by other writers in subsequent issues. Claude Bourdet, in New Reasoner 5 affirmed what the New Reasoner was already doing, in reappraising 'the whole economic and military basis of British foreign policy' (Bourdet, 1958:19), and working through the concrete implications of a (unilateralist) neutralism. But, as with the debate on strategies for economic and welfare changes in Britain, writers differed on whether a significant measure of disarmament could be achieved without transforming capitalism itself. As with the debate on welfare, Ralph Miliband was amongst those who argued, most strongly, that a limited strategy, focusing exclusively on reducing Cold War tensions, could actually have a negative effect. What writers shared, on the nuclear issue as on no other, was a sense of the urgency of protest. The editors, who were already arguing with force that socialists should be campaigning for a policy of neutralism in Britain, saw that this had become yet more urgent following the election of de Gaulle in France. We were, they maintained, facing a pressing and 'dual' danger:

> "First, some local conflict may at any time lead us directly to the threshold of a Hydrogen War. And, second, the Cold War itself, with everyday that it continues, is actively poisoning the political intellectual and cultural life of Europe - West and East - and is making disengagement ever more difficult. The amassing of destructive power, the maintenance of blocs and bases, - these assume an impetus independent of events: as economic and political life is constricted, so the darker forces of reaction, driven out of public life in 1945, are given an opportunity to reassemble in every country. In the West, Adenauer, MacMillan and now de Gaulle: in the East, the Stalinist relapse, the renewed assault on Yugoslavia, the maze of compromise in which Poland is entrapped. Another ten years - if we get through them - and Military-and-Business dictatorship will be the rule on both sides of the 'iron curtain'." (Editorial, NR 5:1)

The New Reasoner's intention to provide analysis that could be taken up by the labour movement did broaden out with time. As the movement for

nuclear disarmament gathered momentum and grew in size, Edward Thompson, in particular, looked again at the New Reasoner's labour movement slant. As we shall see when discussing the new left movement, the campaign for nuclear disarmament challenged the 'old political routines', and solidarities, of the labour movement left.

# CHAPTER 10

## THE GROWTH OF A NEW LEFT MOVEMENT

### The Universities and Left Review

> "How could you live well? we asked. We had a terrific sense of the importance of an attractive environment and of a pleasurable way of living" 1
>
> "We attempted to create a public place, where significant issues could somehow be located, and where significant confrontations could take place." 2
>
> "We just took everything on board that was going ..." 3

The London Universities and Left Review club, the Partisan coffee house, the London schools left club, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and the Direct Action Committee were the first organised foci of new left activity. Providing a space where people interested in socialist ideas could meet and talk, it was here that the nascent new left movement grew. They were novel groups. The range of topics and the diverse origins of attenders marked the Universities and Left Review club off from other political discussion groups. The Partisan, inspired by 'the continental tradition of the coffee house',[4] had no British equivalent; the London schools left club, set up by students from north London schools in 1958 was, to my knowledge, the first of its kind. And the nuclear disarmament movement, which, as we have seen, made a very radical break with the past, was an integral part of what it meant to be 'new left'.

These different groups organised themselves in quite different ways. The Universities and Left Review club adopted a fairly formal structure, with a secretary and a committee, motions and voting procedures. The

1. Hannah Mitchell (interview)
2. Gabriel Pearson (interview)
3. Leone Gold (interview)
4. Hannah Mitchell (interview)

London schools left club was less structured (and fell apart when a formal structure was adopted). In keeping with their political openness, these groups did discuss how they should operate; how decisions were made. But as with their theoretical ideas, their deliberations were still contained, in part, by the ideologies of their day. The Universities and Left Review club was organised by the club committee. This group of around twenty people was made up of the central journal and club figures. On the journal side, three of the editors: Ralph Samuel, Stuart Hall, Charles Taylor; the old Business Manager Rod Prince, and his successor Janet Hase (who had taken over from Rod Prince soon after the journal moved to London) were all committee members. On the club side, Sheila Benson, a Communist Party member and Suzy Benghiat (the woman who, on her own initiative had collected entrance money for meetings) did much administrative work. Max Neufeld, an architect who designed the Partisan, Alan Lovell, a film director, and Alan Hall a classicist whom we met at Oxford, were all members of the club committee. There appears to have been only one formal office: that of secretary. Ralph Samuel was the club's first secretary, shortly followed by Sheila Benson. In April 1959, Alan Hall was elected to take her place.

Meetings of the club committee discussed and planned all aspects of the Universities and Left Review club, from the large meetings and discussion groups to the various campaigns and exhibitions which the club took on. They also discussed other new left projects, such as the London schools left club, and, of course, the Partisan.[1] Sometimes these discussions were briefed by special committees, or by the club executive which was a sub-group of the club committee.

1. The club had one representative on the Partisan board, whose tongue was tied by the fact that much Partisan business, for reasons that will become clear, was confidential.

Whilst virtually no women became intellectual figures in the new left, women were involved in the administration both of the club and the journals. (The ratio of women to men attending club committee meeting was almost 50:50). Those who had a formal office (such as business manager or club secretary) took on public responsibility, and thereby achieved some influence too. Those who simply worked behind the scenes performed many necessary tasks, without public acknowledgement or obvious control. Their contribution, both as workers and as companions, is hard to reconstruct. Barely documented at the time, memories differed on how far there was a sexual division of labour as far as practical tasks were concerned, and on who was supporting whom. On balance, it would seem that women and men shared administration, and there was not a strict division of tasks by gender. The small numbers of people, and the vast amount to be done, had the effect of loosening any pre-disposition to see the day to day work of the journal and the movement in gender specific terms. Sheila Benson, one of the club's secretaries, recalled that 'the division of labour between men and women as we prepared for exhibitions and did jobs was O.K.', (interview). Rod Prince, the first business manager for the Universities and Left Review recalled (interview) that the club and the journal were democratic not because they had worked through how tasks should be done, but because there were so few people involved.

Those women who achieved formal offices were often rather different from other women who were involved. Hannah Mitchell recalled that Janet Hase, one of the business mamangers for the New Left Review,

> "... didn't have equality of status, but was somehow something quite else ... She was not a woman who could be seen by the men there as a sexual object. She was an older, tough, and by the standards of these rather young men, quite a hard-bitten woman of the world. She was Australian, had a straight-from-the-shoulder style. "

Sheila Benson could not be easily objectified either. Also slightly

older, she lived as a single parent with a small son.

Club administration did not take place behind closed doors. Whilst the club was run by a group of self-selected and enthusiastic figures, there were some administrative meetings that all members could attend.[1] Here too, the club's success, future meetings and campaigns were discussed. Before long, the relationship between these club members' meetings and the club committee became a topic for discussion too. When the club was first formed, the club committee claimed the authority to take decisions, whilst keeping the feelings of the club members in mind. But the fact that the committee was a self selected group laid it open to the charge of being undemocratic, and in the spring of 1959, it was agreed that elections should be held, and a new committee formed. Club members' meetings, in broad agreement that all club members should have a vote, discussed how best to make the committee both accessible and democratic. One thing they tried was to call on the committee to 'devise ways and means of acquainting the total membership with intentions and aims for the future of the club'.[2] Club members were subsequently invited to sit in on committee meetings, and the meetings were retimed to immediately precede the large discussion meetings of the club. Clearly both the club committee and the club members were aware of the dangers of democratic centralism that the Communist Party had so recently exposed. There was much criticism too of the lack of democracy in the CND and the DAC, both of which were organised by self-selected 'elites' that were resisting pressure to put themselves up for election. But they were unwilling to abandon a hierarchical structure altogether. In opting for

1. Attendance at these meetings averaged 40, out of a total club membership of 952 in July 1959.

2. Minutes, ULR club members meeting, 17.5.58.

an elected committee (an in re-electing some of the central characters from year to year), the Universities and Left Review club, like all political organisations, was faced with the problem of winning and retaining the active interest and involvement of the club's many hundreds of members in the way the club was run.

One interesting concern that was voiced in the discussion over the method of electing committee members was that of how to avoid a political takeover. The main bogy here was the Trotskyist Socialist Labour League, which the Universities and Left Review club did not, on principle, want to proscribe. (The club committee had, on a narrow vote, condemned the Labour Party for doing just that).[1] Gerry Healy and Socialist Labour League supporters were regular and verbal attenders of club meetings, arousing a mixture of suspicion and awe. The fear of some kind of Trotskyist 'takeover' was not an ungrounded one. More confident and more verbal that many of the club's less experienced supporters, the 'Trotskyist' method of discussion was felt to be very different from the Universities and Left Review club's exploratory and anti-dogmatic approach. Some club members, to this day, believe that the Trotskyist groups were responsible for the demise of the club's movement - though how grounded this was must have varied from place to place. There was, as we shall see, quite enough conflict at the centre of the movement, in London, to ensure that the movement could not survive.

The London Schools Left Club

Unlike the Universities and Left Review club, the London schools left club was slow to adopt a formal structure. Organised informally by a

1. Minutes, ULR club members meeting, 17.5.59.

group of friends in North London, it quickly gathered support. (Meetings advertised in the New Statesman appear to have been its only publicity, beyond word of mouth). The idea of a left club for school students in London was one of the doubtless many schemes to be discussed on the first Aldermaston March of Easter, 1958. There, a group of young people who met up on the march 'decided that a discussion group was needed for people interested in politics and the arts',[1] and, inspired and encouraged by the Universities and Left Review club, they set up just that. Notable new left and Labour Party figures were invited to address what were originally weekly discussion meetings which, at the height of enthusiasm for the London schools left club, could carry on for the whole weekend. Michael Foot spoke to an audience of 100 at their first meeting on 9.5.58; at subsequent meetings, such noteable new left figures as Karel Reisz, Doris Lessing, John Berger and Benn Levy also spoke there. Of the young people who attended these meetings, about two-thirds were from grammar schools in north London, around 50% were women, and '99,999%' middle class.[2] The Partisan was the gathering place for these young new lefters: it was the place where they held their extended discussions and where they met socially 'one night in two'. (Tim Megarry, one of the founder members of the London schools left club, remembers three different kinds of people at the Partisan: the indigeneous Soho crowd; people 'of every kind of ultra-left pursuasion' and this 'bemused bunch of kids').(Interview). By the autumn of 1958, the London schools left club had 250 members.

1. Editorial, Perspective 1, Autumn 1958.

2. Tim Megarry (interview). He was one of the founder members of the London schools left club.

This group, like the Universities and Left Review club, discussed a whole range of issues, including nuclear disarmament and colonial liberation, education and the arts, and, of course, the Labour Party. There were, Tim Megarry recalled, no restrictions on what could or could not be debated, and no 'right way' of seeing the world. But, in the somewhat characteristic way of broad based groups, differences could be left unstated and issues untheorised in order to maintain harmony between group members. It was 'like a left-wing gardeners' club', Tim Megarry recalled (interview). Perhaps the one thing that did hold everyone together, apart from a shared sense of commitment to politics, and growing friendships, was their support for CND.

It was not only the discussion meetings that bore a striking resemblance to the Universities and Left Review club. The London schools left club also decided to bring out their own version of the Universities and Left Review's journal. Perspective, 'edited, written and controlled by school students' was published for the first time in the autumn of 1958.

Carrying a range of writing on British and foreign politics, Perspective, unfortunately, proved to be rather too ambitious a project for this small group to sustain. (There are only two issues lodged in the British Museum library, and although a few others may have been produced, like the London schools left club, it was relatively short-lived).

Whilst looking to the creation of a society of equals, the London schools left club was faced with the more immediate problem of inequality amongst its own members. The men were more verbal than the women, and whilst the fact that the club was predominantly middle class spared it from divisions along class lines, a finer but equally divisive line was drawn along

educational ones. The club was split between those school students who were going to go to university and those who were not - a split that was particuarly disruptive for the club itself since it meant that some of the most involved and dominant members were lost every autumn.[1] Compounding the problem of continuity that a club specifically for school students could not avoid, the division between university and non-university entrants had further implications for the new left. For whilst club members who went to university could start up left clubs in their universities and attend the London Universities and Left Review club in their holidays, school leavers who did not go to university were more likely, as Tim Megarry recalled, (interview) to become involved in some other left group, or to drift away from political life altogether. (In fact, young people in the late 1950s and early 1960s had a growing range of political groups to choose from, including the Labour Party Young Socialists, set up late in 1959, Youth CND, NALSO (the National Association of Labour Student Organisations) and the various Trotskyist groups that became both more numerous and more populous in the early 1960s.

The organisers of the London schools left club were concerned by the non-participation of the majority of its audience at educational meetings. They saw this as a problem of lack of interest and involvement in the topics of the meetings and indeed of the club itself. Looking more to encourage the non-verbal to articulacy than the overly verbal to silence, they experimented with the Universities and Left Review club's scheme of organising administrative meetings for club members.[2] Paradoxically though, this scheme, rather than generating increased enthusiasm and

1. Tim Meggary (interview)
2. Minutes, ULR club committee, 12.5.59.

involvement in the club, marked the beginning of its decline. A formal structure was adopted, and, as a first step, an elected organising committee was set up. In the assessment of one ex-member, Lydia Howard, it was precisely when the London schools left club established a formal structure that it ceased to have any special place on the left: there are far more places, she argued, to be politically active in a formal way. 'Within six months', Lydia Howard recalled (interview) 'the whole thing had disintegrated', not because two of the central people, herself and Lawrence Orbach, were not elected, but because a formal organisation went against the grain of the schools left club.

The London schools left club were confronted here with the problem that has always bedevilled the left - the problem of achieving equality within a political group. Without the sharp awareness that some left groups now have of the potency of the inequalities between people - inequalities of gender, of class, of race, of age - they could not begin to overcome the inequalities between themselves. One course of action they did attempt - that of replacing an unstructured way of working by a structured one - could not succeed in involving members, on equal terms. For without this awareness, no group can overcome problems of exclusion and dominance. Both structured and unstructured ways of working can generate them. And as new left clubs were springing up all over the country; as a new left movement was coming into being, the London schools left club came to a premature end, holding its last advertised meeting on 25.3.60.

The struggles that both the Universities and Left Review club and the London schools left club went through in attempting to find democratic and efficient ways of organising their activities, were nothing in comparison with the Partisan. The romanticism that inspired the project, and the

early enthusiasm with which it was pursued, generated a hopelessly ambitious scheme. The Partisan then met with problem after problem after problem - it was an early new left disaster.

The Partisan coffee house

The Partisan started out as the Universities and Left Review club's answer to the question 'How do you live well?' It was to be a place for

> "drinking good coffee, because after all it had to be nothing but the best. Eating what was wholesome and excellently cooked non-English (i.e. East European and Soviet) food ... In the late 1950s, apart from traditional Soho places which were quite expensive, there was nothing in the way of modestly priced small coffee bars" recalled Hannah Mitchell (interview).

And it had to look nice too. Architect designed, and inspired by the movement in Scandinavian design and furniture, the Partisan was avant garde in style, cuisine (and, as we shall see, in clientele).

> "The idea of the Partisan in part was that it should produce a socialist culture of the kind that was totally lacking in Britain, that you had in the continental tradition of the Coffee House or Inn. There, you would have a ferment of political activity ... It was a place where people would enjoy themselves ... It was deeply romantic in the heart of industrial capitalist London." (Hannah Mitchell, interview).

The idea of opening a coffee house cum meeting place for socialists living in or passing through London was first suggested by Ralph Samuel in July 1957. It was intended, from the very beginning, to have a financial as well as a social function - to raise profits that could be used to help support both the Universities and Left Review journal, and the club. From July onwards Ralph Samuel devoted his very great energies to winning support, and raising funds, for what was an extremely ambitious scheme. He had considerable success. He found premises at 7 Carlisle Street, Soho, where the offices of the New Left Review are

still housed. He raised £3,000 in promised loans by the November of that year. He succeeded in securing the formal adoption of the Partisan project by a group that was formed to further Universities and Left Review projects, the Universities Development Group. (This group had quite an unusual composition. It included two MP's, Stephen Swingler and Harold Davies, and quite often met in the House of Commons, an interesting venue for a group that was attempting to create a coffee house that would attract the working class!)[1] It took on the task of fundraising and wrote to potential financial supporters in an attempt to procure £50 shares and repayable loans, (of £50 upwards). It proposed, too, that 7 Carlisle Street house not only a coffee house, but a meeting room and library, and the office of the review.

Carrying through such an ambitious scheme called for a fair measure of administration, and a smaller working group, (the 'Development Committee Limited'), was set up to supervise the details of planning the project. Over the next few months, the meetings of both the committee and the group were swamped by an interminable series of initial problems, and Ralph Samuel's enthusiastic projection of January 1958 as the coffee house's opening date, stood no chance of being met. Instead, by January, funds for the project, now standing at the impressive £4,000 mark, were still a couple of thousand short, and conversion work had not yet passed the planning stage.

After some false starts an architect was found in Max Neufeld whose plans for converting the first floor of 7 Carlisle Street into a library and

1. From a circular written by Harold Davies, M.P., chairman of the Universities Development Group, which also included Stephen Swingler, M.P., who was the treasurer, and Ralph Samuel, secretary.

meeting hall were accepted by the committee. This part of the project, at least, was completed by mid April. Even this was not insubstantial. The library had space for 1,000 books and 60 people, which, doubling as a meeting hall for 'socialist organisations of a non-Party, non-sectarian character'[1] was used by a wide range of organisations, such as the Central London Catering Workers' Section of the National Union of Municipal and General Workers and the Movement for Colonial Freedom. The Partisan, as the coffee house was named, did not come into being as quickly as Ralph Samuel had promised, simply because of the vast amount of work involved in creating a place of this kind. Funded by not inconsiderable loans from a very large number of people, and calling on a large resource of voluntary labour, the Partisan was an extremely ambitious and adventurous liability. There was much idealism and indeed naivety behind this idea of a coffee bar for the left. It was hoped that radical people, and especially working class people would meet and discuss here, and chess sets were provided to help them pass the time. The decor was modern, in 1950s terms, and tasteful - with white walls and Scandinavian furniture and pottery mugs that were specially commissioned. It also had, at one time, more than a touch of eccentricity in a resident parakeet.[2]

On October the 22nd 1958, the Partisan was opened in a blaze of publicity[3] And in the first four months of its life, 5 or 600 people visited daily - a flood for a coffee house that could only seat 150 people and that found

1. From the list of rules that the Universities Development Group drew up for submission with its application to register as a co-operative.

2. This proved to be a Partisan disaster, since it frequently caught diseases!

3. Cf the article by Pendennis 'Pea Soup and Irish Stew' in the Observer, 2.11.58. This carried a photograph headed 'Scenes at the Partisan: an artist, a poet and a girl'. The (adult) girl was looking appropriately wistful.

that, once people had come, they were often reluctant to leave.

Describing itself as

> "...an 'anti-expresso bar' where people can meet in comfort and at leisure, free from the pressures for quick turnover and high tension which the expresso bars generally impose." [1]

the Partisan found itself with a non-consuming, never leaving clientele, clearly pleased to have found a warm and congenial place to sit. Nor was this clientele necessarily working class or socialist, or particularly supportive of the Partisan. Indeed, they were more often middle class than working class and, to use one participant's phrase, frequently not so much socialists as 'ne'er do well's'. And as the Partisan's specially commissioned pottery mugs rapidly disappeared, its enthusiastic creators learnt the hard way that to run a socialist coffee house in the centre of Soho involved taking on a range of problems that could never be resolved.

A very early problem was that of money. Whilst contributors were assured, at the beginning of January 1959, that the Partisan company had secured 'a reasonably high degree of profit',[2] it was unavoidably clear, by February, that the Partisan was running at a deficit. Faced with the prospect of losing a very large number of left wing friends if it could not repay the people who had contributed loans, the Partisan company had to urgently re-examine the compatibility of socialist principles with business management.

The Partisan had not met with much success on the management side. The

1. Letter to contributors to the Universities Development Group, sent out by the Partisan Company Limited and dated 7.1.59.

2. As above.

Partisan company had felt forced to dismiss its first manager at the end of November (after only three months service), and did not replace her for six weeks, over which time the board of directors carried out management duties instead. The new manager, when finally appointed, was in the unhappy position of facing the Partisan's resident clientele and does not appear to have had much success in asking them to leave.

That the Partisan was not living up to Ralph Samuel's highly persuasive expectations (and Ralph Samuel himself had ceased to be a member of the board of directors by this time) could not fail to come to the attention of the many contributors to the scheme, some of whom were already verbalising concern at the fate of their loans. Contributors were called to meetings in January and February 1959 to discuss their relationship to the Partisan company, because the Universities Development Group had been refused registration as a co-operative. It had decided instead to register as a private limited company, a decision that also met with problems since, in law, the number of shareholders in a private limited company is limited to 50, whilst the Partisan had over 100. The group finally resolved this problem by dividing the shareholders into groups of three. But many more problems lay ahead: the financial (and political) failure of the Partisan was to ensure that the relation between the contributors and the board of directors was to grow increasingly tense as the months wore on.

Even at these early meetings of the Partisan contributors, a plea was raised for better management and indeed for a reappraisal of the relevance of socialist politics to business. This plea was elaborated by Alec Horsley, a member of the board of directors who, living outside London, was perhaps freer to comment on the failures of the Partisan.

In a circular he sent to directors, dated 27.2.59 he wrote:

> "The first thing I must report is the serious deterioration in the quality of the place. It was dirty, untidy and looked more like the waiting room of a main line station than an up-to-date Coffee House. It is impossible to give any real appraisal of the Manager's ability but it is transparently clear that the Pakistanis and other helpers haven't a glimmer of how to deal with the type of customer - mainly non-paying- who occupy the seats in the cafe for very long periods."

The racism of this comment must have made it a difficult one for a socialist group to take up, and indeed Alec Horsley himself did not propose straightforwardly that the 'Pakistanis' be replaced. The course of action he prescribed was to close down for a few days in the hope of shedding the undesirable among the clientele, and to start again with lower costs and better, though not necessarily different, management.

Clearly the Partisan was having difficulty in surviving as a coffee house let alone in providing funds for the Universities and Left Review[1]. In part its problem in attaining solvency stemmed from the idealism of the way it was originally conceived. The notion of producing extravagent food cheaply relied on 'committed' (i.e. badly paid or voluntary) labour. Some 'committed' labour was found. Leone Gold worked behind the bar to fund her way through college. She had a commitment to the Universities and Left Review club - the people as much as the ideas - that, as a younger woman in the group, took the form of helping out administratively with what she herself called 'the dogsbody' work. Despite the concerned voices of contributors, it was only after a year, she recalled,

> "that the penny dropped that this was a business and had to be run as a business. I think it was all part of the tremendous enthusiasm and commitment, and I think everyone just thought that it would run itself." (Leone Gold, interview).

1. Letter to contributors to the Universities Development Group, sent out by the Partisan Company Limited and dated 7.1.59.

However any new attempts at business management failed too. Instead, the Partisan

> "got nastier and nastier and nastier. One didn't even want to go in there for a cup of coffee, it got so bad. At one point it got taken over by drugees; it had a beautiful basement where there were little caverns. In our romantic way we thought how lovely this was for a coffee house, but in fact what happened was that really nasty things happened in those caverns; they were all rather dark and so on." (Leone Gold, interview).

By March 1959, the board of directors finally stated their agreement that the Partisan should be run solely as a business. They decided that, as a first step to achieving this, a new manager should be found and that they should appoint a managing director. The next manager was a (white) and non-socialist man, with much catering experience. He was made specifically accountable to two of the board's members. Some improvements were achieved. A group of volunteers from the Universities Left Review club redecorated the Partisan, and a boxer was employed to clear out the 'layabouts'. There was a new publicity drive. But the financial problems remained. Staff wages had been reduced but takings were lower than ever. In addition, contractors and people who had given the Partisan loans were starting to ask for their money back, adding urgency and embarrassment to the Partisan's financial plight. The board of directors responded to this by paying the most urgent requests, and urging others to wait, and, if possible, transfer their loans into shares.

The Partisan hobbled on. Through changes in managers, redecorations, and several 'fresh starts', the Partisan outlived its intended beneficiary, the Universities and Left Review. When the Universities and Left Review and the New Reasoner merged, the Partisan still pursued the elusive goal of solvency. Finally, Nick Faith came to the contributors' rescue, buying all the shares to the Partisan company and paying everyone back. The basement and the first floor were rented out cheaply to the New Left Review club, whilst the ground floor remained a coffee bar.

Nick Faith's intervention did secure 7 Carlisle Street for the uses of the New Left Review and the New Left Review club. Club meetings were held there, the journal administered from there, and it remained something of a socialist centre for the life of the first New Left Review. When the journal's editor changed in 1962, it ceased to be directly involved in the new left clubs. Then, the character of 7 Carlisle Street changed too. The demise of the left club movement, coupled with the theoreticism of the new journal, saw the reduction in the numbers of people who visited 7 Carlisle Street. But it continued to be something of a political base, housing the New Left Review's office and sporting various left-wing slogans on its walls since those early days of the birth of a non-aligned left.

The Universities and Left Review and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.

Universities and Left Review supporters were very involved in the CND. 'There was a web of activity' recalled Hannah Mitchell (interview), activity that involved not only the same social and political network but 'a similar body of activities and preconceptions', and of 'mood'. As Gabriel Pearson recalled, (interview), 'that whole complex of ideas of 'neither East nor West' was equally at the heart of both CND and the new left' whilst 'the whole CND phenemenon, which itself was really a mood as much as anything else ... fed the ULR'.

The foundation of the CND had been wholeheartedly welcomed by the Universities and Left Review. Opposition to Britain's acquisition of nuclear weapons had been a point of agreement for some time. We have seen how three of the journal's editors had been members of the Oxford university H-bomb Campaign Committee, which had organised the petition in 1954. The journal's editors had called on the Government to halt both the manufacture and the testing of the H bomb in its second editorial of 1957.[1] There,

1. Editorial, Universities and Left Review 2, Summer 1957.

they argued that Britain's 'post-Eden' Government was more committed to nuclear proliferation and NATO that the leaders of the USSR and the USA. They (optimistically) believed that the Soviet and American leaders were ready to agree to a phased disarmament, whilst a jingoistic British Government, in the aftermath of Suez, was attempting to bolster its prestige by developing nuclear weapons.

In the intervening months before the inception of the CND, the various events in the nuclear weapons debate, including Bevan's speech at the 1957 conference, met with little comment in the journal's editorials and articles. But when the CND was formed, the Universities and Left Review journal and the club did a very great deal to ensure its early success. Indeed, the first political activity that the club was involved with, beyond holding educational discussion meetings, was organising the publicity for the first Aldermaston march. With the many thousands of leaflets that Ralph Samuel had enthusiastically printed, they publicised the march in cinemas and cafes all over London. They even extended their activities to, for example, calling for support for the march from a loudspeaker van. In distributing leaflets, putting up posters, making banners, the Universities and Left Review club can claim much of the credit for the size of the first Aldermaston march.

The Universities and Left Review club was also involved with the CND's second large-scale event, the mass lobby of Parliament, on May 20th, 1958. This lobby was held the day before the start of the trial of two of the authors of a long article in the Oxford student magazine, ISIS,[1] on the H bomb. These authors were being charged with infringing the Official Secrets'Act. The concern, particularly of Ralph Samuel, was that whilst this trial was receiving some publicity, very few people were aware of what the original

1.See ISIS 26.2.58. This issue did carry an extremely informative article on the H bomb.

article had actually said. Ralph Samuel had brought this up at a Universities and Left Review club committee meeting, proposing that they produce copies of the article for sale to people at the CND's Mass Lobby. Despite opposition at the meeting, 200 or 300 copies of the article were printed and the committee joined forces to sell it to those attending the mass lobby. They were quickly arrested and taken to Scotland Yard, where, before long, nearly the whole club committee were duly assembled. They were released, with their copies of the article, when the lobby ended, and not charged.[1]

Universities and Left Review supporters' committee to the CND was rapidly made and deeply felt. In so far as support of any one cause symbolised what it meant to be part of the new left, it was the cause of nuclear disarmament. For these socialists, as no doubt for the many other groups of people active in the CND, the CND movement was where these young, radical people felt that they belonged. This affinity between the new left and the CND had several strands. Both arose post Suez and Hungary, at a time when the traditional left groups appeared to have little to offer. In the words of Gabriel Pearson, (interview), they came into being when the Labour Party

> "seemed sealed off from a whole lot of people, from a whole generation of people. The CP similarly was locked into a particular position, and between the two of them, the CP and the Labour Party, it seemed as though ordinary politics, that is party politics, had been monopolised in some kind of way ... people were looking for some kind of terrain between, or not in the grip of, that particular party-political hold."

1. This incident focused club committee members on two features of Universities and Left Review club politics. They became concerned about police surveillance, since the police had known about their intention to sell this article in advance. And they realised the diverse national origins of central Universities and Left Review figures. Assembled in Scotland Yard, there were quite enough foreign faces, they mused, to arouse police suspicion that they were part of a 'foreign plot'.

There was affinity too in the meaning of involvement in the new left and the CND. Both embodied, at their inception, a relatively simple response to an infinitely complex world and, as they developed, both were tolerant of difference and undogmatic; eclectic if unfocused. As Marilyn Butler recalled of the CND marches

> "I was surprised on the march; naively surprised ... at seeing all those other people from all over the country. I had no idea that they existed. They certainly didn't in Oxford. Christians and older pacifists, and I really didn't know about the way there always has been a splintered left of a rather unfocused kind. There was just no evidence of their existence in my undergraduate days. I think that was one of the great things the march did - it really identified and labelled them, identified them to one another." (Marilyn Butler, interview).

Both, also, were liberating in personal terms.

> "The typical CND kind of dress, duffle coats and so on ... were a sort of declaration of release from stuffiness,"

recalled Gabriel Pearson (interview): unconventional though not outrageous; liberating if only mildly revolutionary. And both could be enjoyable. 'You could have a band playing on the CND march, and people could have a really good time ... They were terrifically friendly too. In the traditional left groups, you hadn't had that exuberance and warmth.' (Hannah Mitchell, interview).

Whilst, for many nuclear disarmament campaigners, the bomb was the only feature of contemporary capitalism against which they saw fit to take a stand, for many individuals and groups who came together under the nuclear disarmament banner, the bomb was merely the most terrible feature of a social system which they opposed. For pacificists, it represented the inherent and unacceptable violence of the military state; whilst for Sheila Benson who was a member of the Communist Party, and the secretary of the Universities and Left Review club, it 'was to do with international politics, with monopoly capitalism, the way we lived, our social relationships; with all that.' (Sheila Benson, interview). Emblematic of the evils of capitalism, the bomb

took up a very great deal of the political energy of these early new lefters. In many ways, the nuclear disarmament movement - and, specifically, the CND - was seen as the constituency for new left ideas and for new left 'recruits'. Whilst they were totally committed to the movement's aim, they recognised, as many in the movement did not, that to succeed in banning the bomb would involve no only 'moral' but political change. Hence they saw their task, as socialist nuclear disarmers, to work through the political implications of nuclear disarmament on the one hand, and of the nuclear disarmament movement, on the other.

It was the New Reasoner, more than the Universities and Left Review that took up the challenge of theorising the relationship between nuclear disarmament and socialism. The first article that the Universities and Left Review carried after the CND's inception was in issue 4 (Summer 1958). This was written not by one of the Universities and Left Review's editors, but by Edward Thompson of the New Reasoner.[1] The Universities and Left Review was slow to theorise the implications of nuclear disarmament, but it was quick to recognise what was special about the new left and the nuclear disarmament movements. This specialness was made possible by these movements' relative autonomy from the traditional organisations of the left. In their 6th issue, the Universities and Left Review's editors made this point very plainly when discussing the Labour Party and the CND.

> "What has to be recognised is that the political parties have been by-passed by the new radical movement, which now raises the most crucial issues of the times outside the framework of the traditional parties, because people insist that issues must be stated clearly, and not muffled or muddled ... So long as the Labour Party has nothing to say on these issues, or only what is corrupted by considerations of political expediency, things will continue to happen in this way ...

1. Thompson (1958b). Here, Thompson reiterated the argument that the New Reasoner was developing for 'positive co-existence' and 'neutralism'.

> ...the new radical movement ignores the framework, and refuses to be institutionalised. The protest aginst the H-bomb is not just another piece of 'pressure-group' work, applied through the usual channels, seeking for a change in policy. It is the counter-offensive of people who have been pushed too far and too long in the 'usual channels', who are not 'applying pressure' but making an intransigent demand." (Editorial, ULR 6:1).

As the movement for nuclear disarmament gathered momentum, and failed to achieve its goal, campaigners learnt a great deal about the structures of political power. Neither the nuclear disarmament movement nor the new left remained aloof from traditional organisations - indeed, the relationship between the new left, the Labour Party and the trade unions was hotly contested by writers and activists alike. The Universities and Left Review and the New Reasoner began by placing quite different emphasis on the need to work with, and for, the labour movement. Few Universities and Left Review figures were active trade unionists, and in the early issues of the journal, very little mention was made of the trade union movement.This absence (especially since both Ralph Samuel and Gabriel Pearson had been in the Communist Party), must have been conscious. But the reasoning behind it, beyond the criticisms of centralism, of bureaucracy, of compromise that the Universities and Left Review made of all the organisations of the left, was never clearly stated. One possible factor in this neglect could be that the trade unions were inaccessible to very many of their young, middle class readers. In the late 1950s, today's white collar unions were professional bodies, and were not affiliated to the TUC. Hence the young lecturers and teachers in the Universities and Left Review's readership would have been barred from trade unionism proper. As far as the journals large student readership was concerned, the National Union of Students was an exclusively educational (and right wing) pressure group, with little to recommend it to any socialist.[1] But many Universities and

1. See David Widgery (1969).

Left Review supporters were members of the Labour Party. With the approaching general election, they discussed the Labour Party at length.

The Universities and Left Review, and the Labour Party.

There were wide differences of opinion on the question of how far the Universities and Left Review club should immerse itself in Labour Party politics and election campaigning. On December 21st, 1958, Stuart Hall made a statement to the club members meeting on his notion of the relationship between the Universities and Left Review and the Labour Party. He argued that the club should aim for 'an open position of independence' and influence there. Club members should press the Labour Party

> "to undertake those tasks which, limited in the first place, are intended to probe the weakness of capitalism and to bring about the growth of socialist consciousness,"

without, in the process, being proscribed.[1] Stuart Hall did not think that this was all that club members should be doing, but he did see it as urgent, given the real danger of the return to office of a Conservative Government.

Others at this meeting expressed a range of views on how far, if at all, they should work with Labour. Max Neufeld, for example, questioned whether Harold MacMillan and Hugh Gaitskell were really all that different. He pointed to the harm that a Labour Government pursuing Conservative policies would cause. And another contributor suggested that the club form a new political party, a suggestion that was made more seriously as left clubs grew up in different parts of the country. Others argued that the club and the journal should steer clear of these problems, and devote themselves to developing socialist theory. They maintained that the left could only

1. See Minutes, ULR club members meeting, 1.2.59:1.

hope to transform capitalism if it had an 'indepth' analysis of it.

This meeting did agree to do two things vis-a-vis the Labour Party and the elections. It would send out a questionnaire to Labour candidates, pressing them on their position on key questions such as nuclear disarmament, race, and decolonisation. And (on the basis of a narrow vote), it decided to give active support to two candidates in the election. This idea met with problems when the club committee discovered that the responses made by its two selected candidates, David Pitt and Lena Jager, were 'unsatisfactory'. In the end, they were still given the club's active support.

At subsequent meetings, club members continued to deliberate on their position vis-a-vis the Labour Party. They discussed nuclear disarmament, racism, colonialism, and indeed unemployment, with the aim of turning the Labour Party leftwards in mind. At one subsequent meeting (on 1.2.59), club members considered whether ousting right-wing MP's, or putting up independent candidates, or actively supporting left-wingers, would have most influence on the Labour Party. Whilst most club members apparently did agree with Mike Segal that 'the ULR's value has been that it straddles the Labour Party, one foot in and one out',[1] they differed, understandably, on what this entailed. Indeed, a subsequent meeting was divided on whether or not to support the Direct Action Committee's voters' veto.[2] How different characters approached the question of how, and whether, to support the Labour Party, varied according to how socialist they thought the Labour Party was. Natasha Burkhart, who had been a student at Oxford in 1956 and involved in the socialist club there, made a case for seeing the Labour Party

> "as something very different from the Labour Party of today. O.K., one was fed up because they were doing certain things, but basically one believed that they wanted to create some kind of socialist society ... 1945 was tremendously exciting. One did have a feeling of a sort

1. See Minutes, ULR club members meeting, 1.2.59.

2. See Notes, ULR club members meeting, 1.3.59.

> of 'New World', and there was a tremendous amount of idealism in the Labour Party." (Natasha Burkhart, interview).

Others, such as Max Neufeld, doubted the Labour Party's credentials to be a socialist party at all.

The Universities and Left Review club's concern about how far to support Labour was indicative of it's lack of autonomy from the traditional left. For all that the journal's editors heralded the new left's independence, it lacked the confidence to campaign freely. 'We were badly parasitic on the institutional structures of politics in a way that the left is not now,' recalled Stanley Mitchell (interview). And, as this quote from Leone Gold illustrated, political activism was still seen, by some, as only being possible through party membership.

> "We had a lot of discussions about the distinction between talking about political issues and actually being involved ... I can remember a lot of critical discussion (in the ULR club) about whether or not it was reasonable just to act on a theoretical level and talk about issues without actually going and joining the Labour Party and doing something about it."(Leone Gold, interview).

She was one of the many club members who, as a result of the discussions that were going on there, joined the Labour Party. Sheila Benson, the Universities and Left Review club secretary, left the Communist Party in the late 1950s and joined the Labour Party too,

> "... with some reluctance, but I felt one had to be in a party ... There was nothing else to join but the Labour Party. The Trotskyists and Marxist-Leninist groupings never attracted me." (Sheila Benson, interview).

Even the CND did not remove this felt need to be a member of a party. For the peace movement was also caught up with the issue of how far to campaign to convert the Labour Party, and the question of the new left's relationship to Labour remained unresolved.

The new left continued to have 'one foot in and one foot out' of the Labour Party right through its limited life. An orientation that had arisen partly on the principle that this was the best way to attempt to influence Labour, and partly because of the wide range of opinion within the new left, it did succeed in preventing a split in the movement. There was more general agreement on the need to influence the Labour Party, and the trade unions too. Even those who had little faith in joining the Labour Party did hope to have some influence on it from outside. As Stuart Hall recalled (interview), they hoped that Labour Party and trade union members would come to new left meetings, and take ideas back to their own organisations. They were still left with the longer term problem of how the 'break-back' into the labour movement was going to be achieved: of how they were going to achieve the major changes that they sought. In the short term, opinions on whether or not to publically support the 'voters' veto' of non-unilateralist candidates were divided, partly because of the damage it could do to the new left's relationship to the Labour Party. In the longer term, the Labour Party's unilateralism vote at the 1960 conference raised hopes for the new left's influence. And the reversal of this vote in 1961 dashed them. Perhaps, and paradoxically, if the new left had been wholeheartedly committed to campaigning in the Labour Party, this reversal could have been prevented. But that was unlikely - such was the force of the Labour leadership's campaign, that this would have involved a long, hard and bitter fight.

The pros and cons of joining the Labour Party were never resolved. The Universities and Left Review club, recalled Sheila Benson, had begun by providing

> "a focus for news and information about what was happening in the shattered left. Everyone was very shattered at that time, and the new left fulfilled the role of bringing folk together, coming in out of the storm to huddle together for warmth I suppose ... It was a bridging movement for some people. "(Sheila Benson, interview)

It became much more. As both the Universities and Left Review and the New Reasoner won readers, and as the nuclear disarmament movement gathered momentum, new left clubs were set up in other parts of the country. With varying degrees of involvement in the Labour Party and the labour movement, these clubs signalled the growth of a new left movement that was not contained by the structures of old. By its size, its novelty, and its enthusiasm for socialism, this new left, as we shall see, promised to radicalise the traditional left.

## The New Reasoner.

The New Reasoner, first and foremost, was a discussion journal, committed to the promotion of socialist humanist ideas. The labour movement was the forum which the editors hoped to influence. Whilst they set to their task of developing analyses, clarifying ideas, reworking principles, they called on their readers to make socialist humanism a live concern in the organisations of the labour movement from which they were drawn. The editors were burdened with the work of producing the journal, and they relied on their readers to propagate 'New Reasoner' ideas with encouragement, but little direct help, from them.

At first, the editors thought that the New Reasoner should just be a journal. Only 'in some places - or in special topics' should special 'Reasoner' meetings be necessary.[1] They did not, at this stage, encourage setting up 'Reasoner' groups, apart from the labour movement. However, they were far from rigid, both in their assessment of what counted as 'the mainstream of the movement',[2] and in recognising that in 'special cases', new groups could

1. 'Letter to Our Readers' New Reasoner 4:137.
2. Trade union branches, Labour Party, Workers' Education Association and CP branches, Labour Party forums and the Universities and Left Review club were listed as the venues where the discussion of New Reasoner ideas had, so far, taken place. From 'Letter to Our Readers' New Reasoner 4:137).

be necessary. The best example of the latter was their support for the Fife Socialist League, an independent socialist group that had been set up/by Lawrence Daly and others in Fife. But even when congratulating Lawrence Daly, they added: 'we certainly aren't urging readers to form new parties or leagues'.'Letter to Readers' (NR 5:130). The New Reasoner editors' decision not to encourage their readers to set up separate 'Reasoner' groups, but to work inside the organised left, had strong resonances with the Communist Party view that this was the best way to reach the working class. It was not till later in the decade that they seriously considered the 'new publics' (middle class people; young people) who were becoming politically active, and could be a viable force for change.

With time, the New Reasoner's commitment to work primarily through the institutions of the organised left shifted ground. The editors did not abandon their belief in the over-riding importance of influencing the labour movement, but they did come to support the idea of setting up discussion groups that were separate from it. These were established, initially, in the hope of building up practical support for the New Reasoner outside of Yorkshire. In the autumn of 1958, the editors set up monthly meetings in London which, as John Saville recalled,were organised

> "partly to raise money, partly to keep people in touch, and to give ourselves a sense of having an audience ... which is very important when you come out of an organisation ... We weren't trying to build ... a political organisation ... I was trying to build some kind of organisation just for the New Reasoner that could actually do some work." (John Saville, interview).

Unfortunately for the New Reasoner, the readers' meetings in London did not achieve what had been hoped: they did not generate a core of London supporters who were prepared to do substantial 'foot work' for the journal. These meetings never achieved the regularity of the Tribune society meetings that John Saville was involved with in Hull for example, nor the strong

group of supporters and helpers that the New Reasoner had in Yorkshire.[1] Although the London meetings failed on these scores they, and other readers forums that the supporters of both journals were setting up on their own, did serve very well to encourage discussion and some two-way communication between authors and readers. As Dorothy Thompson recalled

> "The title 'The New Reasoner' was that it was a discussion journal, it wasn't a journal for the promotion of activity. But we did believe very strongly in the left clubs as an extension of the discussion function because we thought ... that one of the biggest problems for people working in history and literature and academic disciplines is to maintain the sort of working contact with politically active people who don't write things down and articulate them, but nevertheless have a great deal of political experience, and thoughts and ideas ... (We thought) that a journal was only going to work if it could be a two-way process of that kind ... learning from the audience and passing things back down." (Dorothy Thompson, interview).

This focus on the clubs as discussion centres rather than activist groups was evidence of the continuing party orientation, on the part of some at least of those who were close to the journal. As the club movement grew, its significance, so they argued, could only be marginal, since the clubs did not have the potential to become a new political party. Some, such as John Saville, regretted this weakness; others, like Lawrence Daly and Ralph Miliband argued (in 1961) that they should try to form a party from the clubs. What is clear is that the clubs, at their inception, were not seen as becoming organised and activist groups. 'To start a new political party takes a hell of a lot more forces that we had at our disposal' recalled John Saville (interview), and the editors were stretched to their limits simply producing the journal.

1. See Minutes, ULR club members meeting, 21.12.58:1. Like the Universities and Left Review club, authors of articles in the New Reasoner discussed their work at these meetings. Examples were Mervyn Jones and Don Arnott, who spoke on 'Socialists in the Campaign' on 10.10.58, and Ralph Miliband and John Rex, who spoke on 'Socialists and the Labour Party' on 14.11.58.

Focusing, still, on discussion rather than campaigning, issue 6 of the New Reasoner urged readers to set up 'schools, conferences, regional readers' meetings' for themselves. 'We ask only one thing: don't form some little in-growing 'reasoner' fragment - co-operate with ULR readers, campaigners, the Labour left', the editors warned.[1] This broadening of focus with issue 6 was a response to the growing new left movement which the editors attempted here to understand. In part, they were taking stock of their own success: having worked to foster socialist humanist ideas, they now saw them becoming a force in political life. But to take stock, they had to work through the significance of this movement's lack of obvious direction and,most importantly, its mistrust of the traditional organisations of the left. On the one hand, the editors made a virtue out of the new left's amorphousness: on the other, they promised to 'get out some kind of collective manifest in a few months time'. This they never did.

The tension between these two approaches betrayed their continuing 'old left' ambivalence to the separateness of the new.

The editors characterised the new left in this way:

> "Very slowly, and sometimes with more sound than substance, it does seem that a 'new left' is coming into being in this country. As yet it has neither a coherent centre nor any clear policies; it is still a mood rather than a movement."('An Appeal to Our Readers', NR 6:137).

Having itemised its diverse supporters, they went on

> "It's a mood still, and we like it that way. We don't want to see it 'jell' too soon into some new nice tight faction with demi-god leaders and a watertight orthodoxy. It isn't a sloppy mood - people are very clear on some things and sharp and effective in their actions: opposition to nuclear war, racial or class oppression, corrupt 'playing at politics', jingoism, stuffy over-bred culture. They are much less clear on a whole range of subjects

1. 'An Appeal to our Readers', New Reasoner 6:141.

which socialists once thought were beyond dispute: the problems of bureaucracy; of controlling the controllers of nationalised industries: wages policy: workers' control: the character of Soviet society: the shape of the socialist State and the character of 'the transition' in Britain: how to displace money from power in the nation's cultural life and bring the mass media under the control of healthy indigenous and democratic forces. It's a mood which affirms a confident humanist outlook, while breaking sharply with the brutal platitudes of power and expediency which have gone by the name of 'Marxism'.

> We don't want to see it 'jell'; the mood wants to reach out to tens of thousands more people before it takes any definite form. But, at the same time, we don't want to see it dissipated for lack of means of expression and forms of self-propagation; nor do we want it to remain a largely intellectual movement, however lively, centering on the ULR Club in London." (Ibid:137).

The New Reasoner editors went on to argue that whilst they thought the new left must 'tie in with the Labour Party left' (Ibid:138), they did not think that wholesale Labour Party membership marked the way ahead. What they looked to, given the diversity of involvements and concerns that new lefters had, was a 'spirit of unity', rather than containment in the same group

By the winter of 1958, more 'discussion centres' were getting off the ground. New left socialists in Manchester and Leeds were planning left clubs; New Reasoner readers in Fife, Colchester, Brighton, Sheffield and at the London School of Economics were holding regular discussions.[1] As these meetings became more popular, the New Reasoner recognised that they could develop a broader role. Not only could they serve to foster 'socialist humanist' ideas in the labour movement; they could also influence people with no political experience, and not only could they arouse interest in the journals; they could also help the new left to 'become a reality' in local areas.[2] The new left, the editors now saw, could be both integral to other campaigns (such as the nuclear disarmament campaign,

1. See 'Letter to Our Readers', New Reasoner 7:151.
2. See 'Letter to Our Readers', New Reasoner 8:146.

or, in 1959, the election campaign) and independent from them.

The New Reasoner, in addition to giving increasing encouragement to the growing new left clubs, also made some positive contributions to the new left movement in these early years. In April 1958, they organised an industrial conference in Sheffield on the theme of 'the advance of the British working class towards socialism'.[1] 'Lively discussions' on both political and economic questions (including equal pay for women), had taken place there, and a 'great advance' had been made 'towards unity, and especially towards working class unity in the NL'.[2] The framework for these discussions had been 'the search for the correct reformist tactics in the present situation but leading to and embraced within a general revolutionary strategy' ('Letter to Our Readers, NR 9:150); the same framework as that of the Socialist Wages Plan.

The New Reasoner hoped to further this unity by bringing out a monthly industrial bulletin Searchlight. This bulletin did not survive long, but the intention: to publish

> "information and comment upon books, pamphlets, articles, of importance to trade unionists: short and sharp discussion on key industrial problems ... a place where our numerous but very scattered readers in industry can exchange ideas."
> ('Letter to Our Readers', NR 10:131).

showed how concerned they were to further their links with the trade union left.

Another rather different activity that the New Reasoner was involved in was the promotion of the Fife Socialist League, an independent socialist organisation that had been set up in Fife, early in 1957. A project that

1. Most of the sessions were concerned with the relationship between the new left, the Labour Party and related movements. It was held on 18-19.4.58

2. 'Letter to Our Readers', New Reasoner 4:137.

was initiated, in the beginning, by ex Communist Party and dissident Labour Party members, the Fife Socialist League set out to 'conduct analytical educational and propaganda work, free from the restrictions imposed by the Labour and CP machines'.[1] The Fife Socialist League aroused much local interest as the Communist Party which was traditionally strong in West Fife, lost 25% of its local membership in 1956-7 (we have already seen how Lawrence Daly felt compelled to make public the reasons for his resignation, and had addressed a packed meeting in Lochore in June, 1956). When the Fife Socialist League was launched, ex CP members and left Labour Party members came together to form an organisation that would remain true to socialist principles, and not be corrupted by stalinism on the one hand or expediency on the other.

It was with the 1958 local elections that the Fife Socialist League became a more noticeable force. The league decided to put up Lawrence Daly as its candidate in his town of Ballingry where he was well-known and well-linked. With the help of local 'workers and housewives', he did extremely well. The League won 1,085 votes; Labour 525 and the CP 197. (No Conservative candidate was standing). From this time on, the league grew in strength. Council affairs were discussed at twice-yearly meetings(and local tenants received bulletins, prior to the meetings, on what the council had done). League members realised however that this work, important though it was, had to spread outwards, and they decided to contest the west Fife constituency in the 1959 general election.

Lawrence Daly recalled how, with the help of new left campaigners, they had 'a mighty good campaign ... I knew we couldn't possibly win, but we got nearly 5,000 votes'. (interview). Fife was an old-time Communist Party

1. Daly (1976:86).

stronghold that in the mid 1950s was represented in Parliament by a right-wing Labour MP, Willie Hamilton.[1] The decision on the part of new left supporters to campaign for Lawrence Daly was far from uncontentious. As Sandy Hobbs, a Scottish new left supporter who was involved in setting up several new left clubs in Scotland recalled, the Fife Socialist League 'summed up one of the biggest problems of the left at that time': the question of Labour Party involvement.

> "Many people in the new left were saying that traditional notions of how to organise in the CP and of working through the Labour Party had largely failed. From here, it was a relatively small step to argue that people in particular areas have the right to organise as they see fit. If there are special circumstances, as there were in Fife, socialist have got to try and work through these. Some of the people who got involved in the new left were very heavily orientated to the Labour Party ... and was really rather antagonistic towards what Lawrence Daly were doing. " (Sandy Hobbs, interview).

In the New Reasoner 10, John Saville took up the arguments that these critics were making. He questioned the argument for working exclusively with the Labour Party given the left's 'intellectual collapse', and the relative isolation, and marginal effectiveness that socialist militants so often experience there. No simple 'formula' could solve this problem.

> "... our central problem is the recreation of a vigorous movement for socialism among the ordinary people. This involves both the development of a body of socialist ideas that makes sense in contemporary terms, as well as the translation of these ideas into forms of political and cultural activity that reach out beyond the existing sects and groups." (Saville, 1959:11).

He concluded that socialists had to be flexible in response to local conditions. The 'special conditions' in Fife had led the New Reasoner to support an independent candidate, but this was an exceptional state of affairs. 'If we develop a really powerful new current of ideas and political activity it is not impossible that a similar situation may be

1. Labour still won overwhelmingly with 25,000 votes. The CP were pushed into third place with 3,828 votes. The Conservative candidate came forth.

produced elsewhere' Saville argued (Ibid:13). Then, similar calculations would have to be made.

A new left was coming into its own, and in the second to last issue of the New Reasoner, Edward Thompson embarked on a detailed and serious appraisal of quite what this new left was. In the face of the challenge that the new left posed to more traditional left politics (and to people such as himself who had come up through the old left), Thompson considered the very radical implications that the new left had, it was clear from his writing that the new left had also changed him.

The new left were drawn to political activity through their awareness of the nuclear threat. Thompson, like the new left, recognised that this awareness meant that 'the old political routines had lost their meaning' (Thompson, 1959:1) and that the politicians must be controlled. The younger new left generation, he realised, had been drawn into political activity to do just this: it was not through idealism or a sense of solidarity with the socialist movement that they had become political actors. It was, for these very reasons, a difficult generation for the old left to understand.

> "... their enthusiasm is not for the Party, or the Movement, or the established Political Leaders. They do not mean to give their enthusiasm cheaply away to any routine machine. They expect the politicians to do their best to trick or betray them. At meetings they listen attentively, watching for insincerities, more ready with ironic applause than with cheers of acclaim. They prefer the amateur organisation and the amateurish platforms of the Nuclear Disarmament Campaign to the method and manner of the left-wing professional. They are acutely sensitive to the least falsity of histricnic gesture, the 'party-political' debating point, the tortuous evasions of 'expediency'. They judge with the critical eyes of the first generation of the Nuclear Age." (Thompson, 1959:2).

But, the first generation 'to experience adolescence within a culture where the possibility of human annihilation has become an after dinner platitude', they were, as he now recognised, 'more mature than his critics on the Old Left'. (Ibid:3). He took the old left to task for failing to inspire people to political activity in the cold war years, and recognised

that the 'young socialist today' had good reason to be '... hostile to the party bureaucracy, hostile to the 'game political', hostile to the machine itself'. (Ibid:5).

Thompson, now, identified himself with them. But he did not do this passively. Far from silencing himself in the face of this new left challenge, he drew on his old left experience to prescribe where the new left should go from here:

> "It must be the first task for any New Left in Britain to propagate and to deepen, in the labour movement and in the nuclear disarmament campaign, not the mere sentiment of neutralism, but the internationalist outlook of active neutrality'. (Ibid:8).

Secondly, he wrote, the new left must construct

> "an alternative 'cultural apparatus', firmly in the hands of the New left, a cultural apparatus which by-passes the mass media and the party machinery, and which opens up direct channels between significant socialist groupings inside and outside the labour movement."(Ibid:8).

Thirdly, it must continue to work on theory, and, in particular, on a theory that would draw together

> "the dissident Communist impulse with the left socialist tradition of the West and with the post-war generation. It is at this point of confluence that the new left can be found." (Ibid:9)

And fourthly, the new left must strive to change people's values:

> "... the summoning up of aspirations to further change by means of utopian critiques of existing society, remains as much the duty of socialists as the conquest and maintenance of working class power." (Ibid:10).

For all the very pertinent criticisms that the new left made of the old, Thompson concluded that the new left should not set itself apart from it. It was not, he argued, an alternative organisation to those already in the field. Instead, it should provide services and ideas for the left:

> " What will distinguish the New Left will be its rupture with the tradition of inner-party factionalism, and its renewal of the tradition of open association, socialist education, and activity directed towards the people as a whole. It will stop fooling people that international or internal problems are going to be solved by the existing Parliamentary Labour Party, or by a series of electoral contests, with slightly more 'left' candidates. It will break with the administrative fetishes of the Fabian tradition, and insist that socialism can only be built from below, by calling to the full upon the initiatives of the people. It will insist that the Labour Movement is not a thing, but an association of men and women; that working people are not the passive recipients of economic and cultural conditioning, but are intellectual and moral beings. In the teeth of the Establishments of Power, of Orthodoxy and of Institutions, it will appeal to people by rational argument and moral challenge. It will counter the philistine materialism and anti-intellectualism of the Old Left by appealing to the totality of human interests and potentialities, and by constructing new channels of communication between industrial workers and experts in the sciences and arts. It will cease to postpone the satisfactions of Socialism to a hypothetic period 'after the Revolution', but will seek to promote in the present, and in particular in the great centres of working-class life, a richer sense of community - a socialist youth movement (semi-autonomous, if need be), rank-and-file international contacts, and social activities." (Ibid:16-17).

It would attempt to do all this, through its publications, its left clubs its educational meetings. Its autonomy from the structures of power in the left would spare it from interference by 'the bureaucracy' on the one hand, and 'the factionalist sects' on the other. Meanwhile, its influence like the influence of the nuclear disarmament movement, would grow to the point where Thompson hoped,

> "the orthodoxies of established politics will appear as irrelevant as the squabbles of the contractors who built the Great Pyramid, and the Old Left will give place to the New." (Ibid:17).

It is enormously difficult to assess the effect of Edward Thompson's writing. His knowledge of and confidence in the socialist tradition of the 'British commoner', his faith in the possibility of a socialist revolution, and his authority as a political activist could have given courage to people who were new to socialist ideas and campaigning. He must have intimidated his readers too. His long lists of political tasks, and his prescriptive statements on how to do them, were not realistic agendas for socialist campaigning. The politically inexperienced were as likely to feel overwhelmed as guided by writing such as this. Nonetheless, the early new left was

a very open movement: all influences and all comers were (in theory anyway) welcome amongst them. Edward Thompson's list is one attempt by an ex 'old left' person to set out the range of new left concerns.

Edward Thompson did not verbalise the assumptions about personal relationships that were part, too, of new left politics. The new left's commitment to a 'moral' politics embraced common beliefs about personal life. In Gabriel Pearson's recollection, notions of responsibility, maturity and stable human relationships were central to this - theirs was a 'moralistically centred interest', observant of social authority on such issues as sexual freedom, styles of dress, relationships between the generations. The 'new left way of life' did not involve the rejection of social mores, but challenging them in mild, reasonable and 'mature' ways. These personal challenges were not always translated into political terms. Indeed, most people recalled that personal relationships were not discussed very much at all. It was not until the late 1960s that the left took on board the politics of personal liberation.

# CHAPTER 11

## THE UNHAPPY MERGER: THE NEW LEFT REVIEW

The editorial boards and some of the contributors and readers of the New Reasoner and the Universities and Left Review met, in Sheffield in October 1958 to discuss how they could best help to consolidate this new left. They made plans here to co-ordinate the educational side of the movement, arranging meetings, schools and the publication of new left books. And they decided to meet again in December 'to discuss in detail the possibility of a merger' ('Letter to Our Readers,, New Reasoner 7:151) of the two journals, inviting readers comments in the meanwhile.

> "Much might be gained if editors, contributors and readers could pool their energies in a single effort, building auxilary research, educational and propagandist activities around one regular bi-monthly."
>
> 'Letter to Our Readers'
> New Reasoner 7:151.

These discussions were taking place in the context of the financial insecurity of the Universities and Left Review, and the near exhaustion of the New Reasoner's editors. The future of both groups was relatively insecure, and a merger promised one way out of crisis. (Another for the Universities and Left Review, was to take up the offer made by the publisher Stevens and Sons, to take over financial control of the journal, leaving editorial control in the hands of the Universities and Left Review Board).[1] In the interim, both the New Reasoner and the Univesities and Left Review decided to broaden their political spectrum, and added new members to their editorial boards.[2]

1. From John Saville, 'Background to the Merger Question', n.p.; n.d.; cited by Holden (1976:286). This deal had collapsed by January 1959.

2. Don Arnott, Mervyn Jones and Ralph Miliband were added to the New Reasoner's editorial board. Alan Lovell, Alan Hall, Alasdair MacIntyre and Norman Birnbaum were added to the Universities and Left Review's board. Michael Barratt-Brown became the 'interlocking editor' between the two.

These discussions on the merger were taking place as new left clubs were being set up outside London. These were given active support by the Universities and Left Review club which organised national speaker tours, and gave both inspiration and advice to new left socialists elsewhere.[1] New left people in Manchester and Edinburgh were the first to set up clubs and indeed coffee bars of their own, and supporters in Leeds, Glasgow and Birmingham quickly followed suit. By July 1959, these five clubs were established, and many more were in the process of formation.

As these new clubs were being set up, the London Universities and Left Review club proposed that a co-ordinating committee be formed, and it organised a left club conference, in September 1959, to which club members were invited. With representatives from Leeds, Manchester, Edinburgh, Birmingham, Glasgow and London, this conference voted to set up a new left standing committee with two joint convenors, Simon Rosenblatt and John Thirwell..[2] From this time onwards, Simon Rosenblatt and John Thirwell were to have the very difficult task of trying to find common purpose in a movement that was, in principle, open and undoctrinaire. They also had the near impossible task of collecting subscriptions from groups that were reluctant to part with scarce funds for a service that

1. A Universities and Left Review club members meeting on 17.5.59 decided to devote more energy to taking discussions out of the London area. (see minutes, 17.5.59). They had already arranged for Claude Bourdet and the authors of The Insiders to speak in a number of different cities.

2. Circular to left clubs from the new left standing committee, autumn 1959

they were not entirely sure that they wanted. Nonetheless, the clubs had a great deal in common, and much to gain from some co-ordination. Public educational meetings, coupled with study and discussion groups; projects such as exhibitions; and some joint work with other left and labour movement groups were the main activities of all left clubs, as well, of course, as working with the CND.

Part of the rationale behind the merger was to respond to this growing movement. If the editorial work was shared, people and resources would be freed which could then be committed to organising the 'Left Clubs, conferences, publications, campaigns etc.' ('Letter to Our Readers', NR 9:149) of this nascent new left. This new journal, in the words of the New Reasoner editors, would be

> "capable of responding much more fully to the pressing demands of the situation, and, in particular, of establishing contact with the new and quite untraditional publics which are emerging."
>
> ('Letter to Our Readers', NR 9:149)

Nonetheless, the merger did not proceed without doubts and dissent. There were 'more eager and less eager people' to quote Edward Thompson, (interview). [1] Ralph Miliband and ourscience advisor, Dan Arnott, and possibly one or two others were less eager because they thought the New Reasoner had a particular character which would get lost in the merger', (Edward Thompson, interview). But given that the merger provided a viable way of continuing with publication, it was something they were willing to support, 'even if they weren't very keen on it'. [1]

1. John Saville (interview) recalled that he had been 'somewhat sceptical' about it, until it was definitely agreed, and then he agreed to become chairman of the New Left Review board.

Ralph MIliband, Edward Thompson recalled, still 'regarded it as necessary to build up a more clearly marxist tradition of theoretical work and analysis. Ralph felt that (those elements . . ) in the ULR group were really radical liberal culturalist people who would not systematically develop this tradition.' (Edward Thompson, (interview). Edward Thompson himself tried to straddle the marxist and the cultural-ist position: he argued for the strengths, and the compatibility of both.

At a joint meeting of editorial boards on 26.4.59, the two journals agreed to merge. The new journal the New Left Review was to have a full-time editor, Stuart Hall, and a full-time business manager, Janet Hase, both from the Universities and Left Review. It was to be published six times a year - more than either the New Reasoner or the Universities and Left Review. They hoped it would retain the combined circulations of both (3,000 and 8,000) respectively. The editorial boards of both journals came together to give advice to the New Left Review's editorial executive and its editor and, crucially, to become involved in new left activities.[1]

Both the New Reasoner and the Universities and Left Review devoted some space in their last issue to an assessment of their short histories, and of the way ahead. The Universities and Left Review described how its readership and support had grown outwards:

1 The editorial executive included Michael Barrat-Brown, Stuart Hall, Peter Worsley, Derek Kartun, Ralph Samuel, John Saville, Charles Taylor,Malcolm MacEwen and Edward Thomson. For the first six months this met every two weeks, thereafter every three. Names of members were never listed in the New Left Review. There was also a business committee of which Nick Faith, Michael Barratt-Brown, Lonnie Fuller, John Saville and Stuart Hall were members.

> "What we felt needed to be expressed and discussed amongst university students in 1955 and 1956 were the same questions about socialism - content, theory and practice - which agitated many other people. Some of our readers had been through university or technical colleges in the worst days of the Cold War, and had never heard politics taken seriously or discussed: many belonged to the 'scholarship boy' generation, who felt that, without the serious stimulus of socialism they would lose their way for good in the lower reaches of Mr MacMillan's Opportunity State. Many others had given long years of service to the Labour Movement: to them, ULR must often have sounded a brash and discordant note. Nevertheless, the very fact of the journal, and the discussions which grew up around it, appeared to give heart to many who might otherwise have slipped away from politics altogether."

( Editorial , ULR 7:1)

The editorial then described the new 'current of feeling which had entered politics in Britain since the thaw in 1956' (ibid:1) and which they hoped to represent.

> "Without CND supporters, Anti-Ugly protesters, African demonstrators, Free Cinema and the Society for the Abolition of the Death Penalty, we would be no-where",

they wrote (ibid:2), concluding that they hoped that the New Left Review would continue to give voice to these movements, and organise initiatives of its own.

The New Reasoner was briefer. Satisfied, overall, with their achievements (not the least of which was surviving for three years) the editors concluded that 'it was worth it: just'. They did though attempt to define the relationship between the journal and the movement. 'The thing is moving you see. The need, the people, the mood, is there. Our problems, again and again, are those of organisation.' ('Letter to Our Readers, NR 10:131). The New Left Review board would step in here and 'push-off and co-ordinate' the activities of this nascent new left.

It was abundantly clear, by the time the first issue of the New Left Review appeared in December 1959, that the new left had a life, and a radicalism, of its own. The fact that the new left did not have a 'line' to campaign for or a strategy to pursue, meant that its influence was more to facilitate discussion than to take the lead; to open up possibilities and not to narrow them down. The lack of theoretical or strategic unity that was characteristic of the CND, in particular, was doubtless frustrating for the many hundreds of people who had clear but divergent visions of the CND's road to success. But even the more experienced socialist campaigners found this youthful and 'amateurish' movement offered much that was new and liberating and relevant. The nuclear disarmament movement may not have deposed the military elite, but it certainly unsettled the traditional left. The CND and the new left together, in opening up whole areas for political debate and protest, in drawing in the middle class, women, young people, did ensure that socialist politics were never quite the same again.

The New Left Review was launched, with not inconsiderable publicity, at a packed meeting in St Pancras Town Hall, in London, on 14.12.59. In his press release Stuart Hall the new editor, focused on the consequences and implications of Labour's third election defeat, and stated that socialists 'must return to the task of socialist analysis, education and propaganda which the Labour Party has neglected for ten years in opposition.'[1] He criticised Labour Party policy on the grounds that it

[1] See Stuart Hall (1959c:1)

offered 'not democratic social ownership, but bureaucratic State Management' (Hall 1959b:1); that it accepted 'nuclear diplomacy and conservative imperialism'; that it had neither offered a 'clear picture of capitalism', nor made socialists. It had become an ageing, inactive and devitalised organisation at locallevel' (Hall, 1959b:2). In particular, it had failed to appeal to the young.

> "... by blurring the distinctness of its appeal to morality, principle and conscience, it woefully misjudged the idealism of young voters who, this time, cast a negative vote in their majority for things 'as they were'." (Hall, 1959b:2)

The New Left Review's answer to this ossification and rightwards drift in the Labour Party was to build up 'the active socialist opinion' that the party had clearly failed to do. The New Left Review, Stuart Hall promised, would provide the 'active intellectual centre for the Movement' (ibid:3), both by publishing the journal, books and pamphlets, and by encouraging left clubs and smaller discussion groups, nation-wide. They were particularly concerned to develop 'two way contact between young industrial and intellectual workers '(ibid:4), and planned to take new left discussions into industrial settings. Indeed, it hoped to draw together 'all Labour people and independent socialists, established or unestablished' (ibid:4) in a 'movement of people and ideas' for socialism.

Both the size of the audience (c.700) and the array of 'illuminati' who were present at the launching gave the New Left Review a fairly memorable send-off. A very wide range of notable people had been prepared to give the New Left Review their public support. Individuals

as diverse as Michael Foot, Joan Robinson, Bert Wynn, C. Wright Mills and Kenneth Tynan had signed a sponsoring letter[1]; and A. J. Ayer, Claude Bourdet and Doris Lessing were among the well-known figures who were on the platform at the St Pancras meeting. It was a serious occasion: the tone of the press release appears to have been matched by the mood of the audience. To quote the New Statesman reporter who attended the meeting and then went along to the Partisan, the whole evening (like the new left itself) was 'a bit moral':

> "There wasn't much laughing and shouting at the meeting, and the wasn't much laughing and shouting here; only grave faces considering grave events and the problems of post-capitalist society, faces weighed down by the troubles of our time."
>
> (NS, 19.12.59:876)

So what was the New Left Review? A bi-monthly journal, 93/4" by 71/4" in size, it had between 68 and 72 pages per issue. It was consciously modern in style, printed onshiny paper, illustrated with photographs and line drawings, using lower case letters for its own title and some section headings. In its first issues (1-8) it carried a short editorial and a letter to readers, the editorial commenting on recent political events, and the letter addressed to new left people in the clubs. Later issues only carried brief 'notes to readers' on the inside cover. Its articles, on the whole, were fairly short, and although the format did vary they were usually divided into four groups. The first, like the editorial, were essentially political commentary; the second, typically, addressed the major theme of the issue; the third, in the

1 New Left Review appeal circular, December 1959

'notebook' section, covered a whole range of topics, and the fourth were book reviews. Later issues also carried a brief correspondence section. There was some space too, for club announcements, and the New Left Review printed a list of the names and addresses of the left clubs at the end of each issue.

The public face of the NLR hid much private dispute. The large board - consisting of the combined boards of the two parent journals - included a very wide range of politics and experience.[1] But it was too large, and too diverse to function as a working group for the review. It was an attempt Raymond Williams recalled, to

> ".... gather together a whole generation which the experience of the Cold War decade had disrupted. Still I got the sense of an assembled generation rather than one which had truly come together."
>
> (Williams, 1979:363)

Board members disagreed over the journal's style, its content, and, inevitably, its relationship to the new movement. Sandy Hobbs recalled how jokes were made, when the first issue of the New Left Review came out, that the next thing that had to happen was to found a New Reasoner.

1. The New Left Review board met quarterly and included, for the first issue, Ken Alexander, Don Arnott, Michael Barratt-Brown, Norman Birnbaum, Alfred Dressler, Alan Hall, Mervyn Jones, Michael Kullman, Doris Lessing, Alan Lovell, Malcolm MacEwan, Alasdair MacIntyre, Ralph Miliband, Ronald Meek, Gabriel Pearson, John Rex, Ralph Samuel, John Saville, Randall Swingler, Charles Taylor, Dorothy Thompson, Edward Thompson, Raymond Williams, Peter Worsley: 22 men and 2 women. By issue 2, Malcolm MacEwen, Alasdair MacIntyre, Randall Swingler had left, and Lawrence Daly and Paul Hogarth had joined. By issue 5, Dennis Butt, Nick Faith, John Hughes and Paddy Whannel had joined. By Issue 6, Alan Lovell had left. By Issue 12, Don Arnott had died.

> ".... Mixed up here were political disappointments and organisational disappointments, and physical disappointments, like the fact that it was on glossy paper - a selling out to the consumer society that we were all against." (Sandy Hobbs, interview)

Dorothy Thomson recalled how

> ".... it wasn't my sort of journal in layout and presentation and length of article and some of the areas of preoccupation... I found the writing just boring, and all these glossy photographs - I just can't respond to photographs in glossy Magazines." (Dorothy Thompson, interview)

The dual role of the board vis-a-vis the journal and the clubs was a source of disagreement too. Raymond Williams recalled how Edward Thompson was 'very excited by the prospects for the new movement in 1956-61', (Williams, 1979: 364) and looked to ' a new political movement that would completely transform or replace the existing Labour Party'. (ibid: 363) Raymond Williams himself had a more modest aim of 'keeping the publishing and discussion programme going'. (ibid: 363). Even the decision to appoint Stuart Hall as editor had not been plain sailing. Whatever the reasons that had swayed in his favour, Stuart Hall embarked on the job of editor less than confident about his own appointment. He thought that Edward Thompson should have been editor: and his doubt, coupled with Edward Thompson's looming presence and 'overpowering image', stood in the way of a good working relationship between them, and indeed of Stuart Hall's own effectiveness on the job. This was exacerbated by a series of disagreements over how the New Left Review was launched, with the result that

> ".... the question of confidence between London and Halifax was not only raised, but settled, buried before we began. It was not a working axis, but a buried bone of contention."[1]

1. Mimeographed letter from Stuart Hall to Edward Thompson, 20.6.61, sent also to Charles Taylor, Ralph Samuel, Nick Faith, Dennis Butt.

Despite these very considerable tensions, the New Left Review adopted a confident tone. Appealing to potential readers, a publicity leaflet described how the journal intended to

> "..... maintain the same wide coverage, the same slant in discussion, which marked the growth of two journals. We shall try to cover the long-range discussion of policies and programmes in the advance of socialism. The regularity of bi-monthly publication will also enable us to make more frequent comment upon current topics and issues. We are planning for a wider international coverage, more regular scientific articles, and material on trade union and industrial matters than either journal has so far managed. But we shall continue to publish regular articles on culture, on cinema and art, and to probe the thousand recesses of the 'unknown country' we inhabit. We aim to maintain a sharp polemical critique of capitalism - its institutions, its culture and values, both as they affect the strength of the Labour Movement and the transition to socialism in Britain, and as they influence the Cold War and the preparations for nuclear suicide."[1]

The first editorial introduced this ambitious and wide-ranging project by quoting William Morris from Commonweal 1885:

> "The real business of Socialists is to impress on the workers the fact that they are a class, whereas they ought to be Society ..... The work that lies before us at present is to make Socialists, to cover the country with a network of associations composed of men who feel their antagonism to the dominant classes, and have no temptation to waste their time in the thousand follies of party politics." (Morris quoted in Editorial , NLR 1:3)

The New Left Review also set out to 'make socialists' - and not lose them, or itself in the party machines.

> "..... We are in our missionary phase. The Left Clubs and New Left centres - the New Left in general - must pioneer a way forward by working for socialism as the old missionaries worked: as if consumed by a fire that is capable of lighting the darker places in our society. We have to go out into towns and cities, universities and technical colleges, youth clubs and Trade Union branches, and - as Morris said - make socialists there." (Editorial, NLR 1:2)

1. New Left Review appeal circular, December 1959.

The new left was a 'movement of ideas', in which writers, readers and activists would learn from each other. And with time, new left discussion groups would become enclaves of socialist practice. The new left needed to do what the labour movement, and, specifically the Labour Party, was currently failing to do - to educate and inspire people to actively work for socialism. This involved meeting

> "people where they <u>are</u>, where they are touched, bitten, moved, frustrated, nauseated - to develop discontent and, at the same time, to give the socialist movement some <u>direct</u> sense of the times and ways in which we live."
> ( Editorial , <u>NLR</u> 1:1.)

This new left 'mission' would generate

> "a living movement of people, battering away at the problems of socialism in the mid-Twentieth Century, pooling their experiences, yet, at every point, breaking back in to the Labour Movement, thrusting forward like so many uninvited guests into Constituency Parties and Trade Union branches, pushing within CND, picking up the quick tissues of society, sloughing off the dead .....
>
> We shall - in Left Clubs or Tribune Societies, informal groups and university clubs - be parallel to, rather than competing with, existing organisations of the Labour movement: free where they are tied, maintaining a direct link with similiar movements and tendencies in other countries."
> ('Editorial' <u>NLR</u> 1:2)

This first editorial concluded by arguing that no-one should <u>prescribe</u> forms of socialist activity. Openness, democracy, agency, were at the heart of the socialist values they sought to propagate. It was up to new left supporters to make socialists, and socialism, as they thought best.

The New Left Review, like the New Reasoner and the Universities and Left Review, was inspired by a sense of the potential for radical change. The writers in these journals shared their experiences and hopes, writing 'subjectivist' accounts that kept quite close to the immediate historical and political experiences of the group - the class, the generation, the party - to which they belonged, or with whom they identified themselves. To quote Tom Wengraf,

> "No consciousness-raising exercise would do it differently: evitability, possibilism, utopia and the language of repressed or unused potential are the natural modes of experiencing and the desirable modes of cognition of such periods. They are means of action, deployed to help people back into a condition of activity after having been seduced or bullied into passivity." (Wengraf, 1979:82)

Theirs was the 'language of choice, of personal responsibility, of agency, of possibility'(ibid: 81) and the journals were the means by which they appealed to others to recognise their common experiences and shared identities, and leave 'apathy' behind. Whilst different new left authors appraised the failings of socialist analysis and campaigning in different ways; whilst they proposed varied strategies and emphasised different features of a socialist future, they all shared this commitment to 'making socialists'.

These 'subjectivist' accounts appealed to the subjective in others. Consciousness more than structure, agency and not determinism dominated new left writing. They related their examination of capitalism's 'false priorities' to how people perceived the conditions of their daily lives. They appealed to what was 'false' or wrong under capitalism to inspire people to reject the system as a whole. And they attempted to piece

together a common vision of a new society that new left socialists could actively work to create. It was not a highly theoretical journal. Its authors did not produce abstract analyses of capitalism (or communism) as modes of production. They did not produce sophisticated theories on the nature of ideology, on the relation between experience and consciousness. They did not, for all that they did recognised the importance of relating culture to the economy, or defence to welfare, build up a model of capitalism as 'a totality'. (It was Forster's 'only connect' and not Lukacs 'totality' that was emblematic of the Universities and Left Review, and carried over in to the New Left Review). But they did go some way to uncovering 'the way we see ourselves', and persuading people of the possibility and the urgency for change.

The New Left Review and Clause 4

For all that it sought to 'make socialists' independently of the party machines, the New Left Review still saw the crisis in the Labour Party, and the 'march and counter-march of foreign events' as its most immediate political concerns.[1] The New Left Review began its project of providing analysis for the new left movement with a detailed study of the Labour Party, and the crisis it was in. It examined its failings and its potential for change, joining in with a wide-ranging debate that Labour's third electoral defeat had engendered. Far from maintaining that Labour's ills could be cured by victory at the polls, and a period of rule, New Left Review's authors argued that the party was so short on socialist policy that it could not offer a viable alternative to the Tories.

1 From Stuart Hall, 'Report on the journal to the Editorial Board', 7-8.1.61.

It was in their assessment of Labour policy too, that the New Left Review provided something approaching an analysis of capitalist economics. This analysis was tied in with the debate on the future of Clause 4 of the party's constitution. A very heated debate within the party had been initiated by Hugh Gaitskell at the 1959 Labour Party conference, where he had proposed that Clause 4 be 'revised'. The resistance that Gaitskell's proposal met with ensured that it was formally dropped, but the debate on the relevance of Clause 4 waged on for two more years. The New Left Review set out to defend Clause 4, but to defend it in ways that moved beyond simple statements of allegiance.

Some writers, such as John Hughes, author of the Socialist Wages Plan, developed the left-wing 'labour movement' approach that we have come across already in both the New Reasoner and in Universities and Left Review (Cf The Insiders).[1] They focused on the determining influence of the economic basis of industrial capitalism, analysing the 'commanding heights' of Britain's supposedly 'mixed economy'. They drew up predominantly industrial programmes around which the labour movement could actively campaign for change. These writers recognised that, in the near future at least, there was little prospect of revolutionary change as a result of capitalist crisis. Capitalism did appear to be stabilised, and to be enjoying a period of growth. It was up to the labour movement in conditions such as these, to wrest what advantages

1. Articles that addressed the left-wing labour movement approach to the role of the British labour movement included: Vic Allen (1960); Dennis Butt (1961); Royden Harrison (1960); Ralph Miliband (1960); John Saville (1960).

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from capitalist 'prosperity' it could.

The labour movement left, so John Hughes argued, should develop an economic programme that would combine stable growth, improved real incomes, and better social security, and would enable the labour movement to gradually take control of the economy.[1] Ralph Miliband traced the process whereby the Labour Party had settled for 'a programme of tinkering empiricism within the framework of capitalist society', (Miliband, 1960:7) saddling itself with a leader who was committed not to socialism, but the 'mixed economy'. He argued that the Labour Party could commit itself again to the creation of socialism through 'common ownership ,and that the left should campaign for it to do just this.

There were New Left Review authors, too, who spoke from the concern with community that the Universities and Left Review had developed. These authors,whilst they agreed that common ownership of the means of production was essential to socialism, were less interested in the economic and industrial base of capitalism than 'public, social and community needs' (S. Hall, NLR 2:3) that capitalism could never meet.

These analyses, recalled Charles Taylor, were aiming at

> ".... a conception of socialism that went beyond simply having common ownership of themeans of production, full employment, equality; a socialism defined as expanding possibilities for creative life and activity for as many people as possible."
> (Charles Taylor, interview)

1. See Hughes (1960 a,b,c)

They placed themselves

> "... outside the theories of either communism or official social democracy, which define the goals to be achieved in almost exclusively economic terms. We had the insight then that if you are going to have anything like socialism, you would need some kind of cultural mutation, first of all, but secondly, and part of the whole point of the exercise, was that people could live more creative lives. They could not simply have - though that was important - greater prosperity, full employment, but be more creative." (Ibid)

These authors 'were looking, exploring, trying to reformulate' - and the economic was not their dominant concern.

Charles Taylor's 'What's Wrong with Capitalism',[1] illustrated well thecommunity emphasis of much New Left Review writing. One of a series of articles that were intended to link 'theoretical argu - ments to the current political debate in the Labour Party' (NLR 2:2). Taylor began by admonishing capitalism for failing to provide for human needs. This failure, he argued, was the direct result of the 'profit system' on which the economy was based. His support for common ownership - and hence for Clause 4 - was to herald a society where the 'community' would be able to make sure that its needs were no longer sacrificed to those of profit. Then, we would need to

> "... experiment with different forms of control, so as to draw upon the social responsibilities of people in such vital things as what kind of education they give their children, what sort of houses they live in, where the hospitals are placed, when the roads will be built, what the city will be like to live in fifty years from now, what proportion of our national resources go to consumer goods, what proportion to investments and to welfare." (Taylor, 1960:11)

[1] See Taylor (1960)

In other words, he looked to a society where people would take active responsibility for all aspects of social life, and the fact that he placed community and welfare concerns before the economy on his list, was indicative of his own, and the New Left Review's special commitment to them.

There was in addition, a third current of thinking in the New Left Review. This current came out of the Communist Party tradition that the New Reasoner had developed, and focused on socialist values and working class agency in the making of socialism. Edward Thompson, for example, in his contribution to the Clause 4 debate, stated unequivocally that the expropriation of the capitalist class was essential to socialism. It was fruitless, he argued, to 'appeal to morality .... outside the context of power.'

> "..... contradiction which expresses itself in opposed values is grounded in the private ownership of the social means of production. The profit motive remains at the core of our social order, engendering new conflicts which by their nature may be controlled or mitigated but cannot be resolved." (Thompson, 1960b:4)

However this recognit ion of capitalist power did not lead Edward Thompson to give primacy to industrial militancy. In 'The Point of Production', he had stated that:

> "We do not have one 'basic antagonism' at the place of work work, and a series of remoter, more muffled antagonisms in the social or ideological 'superstructure', which are in some way less 'real'. We have a class divided society, in which conflicts of interest and conflicts between capitalism and socialist ideas, values and institutions take place all along the line." (Thompson, 1960a: 68)

Nor did it lead him to support the view of Labour and Communist Party

'fundamentalists' that socialism could be legislated into existence from above. Capitalist power, so his argument ran, could not be conceived simply as economic power. Instead, it affected 'every area of our lives', and it was in every area that it had to be resisted.

This orientation to capitalist power opened the way to a positive analysis of the advances that had already been made 'within the womb of capitalism', and to an optimistic appraisal of the potential for future change. As a result not only of economic stability, but, crucially, of working class power and influence, the conditions of people's lives had improved. Full male employment, and the provision of welfare, did mean that the worst excesses of poverty were thought to have abated. And beyond this, these advances embodied socialist values which were fundamentally opposed to the acquisitive and competitive ethic of capitalism, and were a real threat to it.

These New Reasoner authors were very aware, nonetheless, that neither an end to poverty, let alone an egalitarian society, could be achieved through a programme of piece-meal social reforms. Higher living standards and better welfare would not mark the transition from the 'equal opportunities' of capitalism to the 'true equality' of socialism; from the relief of hardship to the satisfaction of social needs.

Ralph Samuel expressed the way that socialist values had been embodied in the campaigns that had been waged in the past with eloquence. A member of the University and Left Review's editorial team, Ralph Samuel's own political background, as an ex Communist Party member and a historian, placed him with the editors of the New Reasoner. Samuel

argued in the New Left Review, as he had argued in the Universities and Left Review, that it was in the organisations of the labour movement that socialist values had come into their own.[1]

> "For more than a century, the Labour movement has been sustained by a generous belief in the capacity of people to triumph over the adversity of circumstance and the cramp of necessity: it is a belief embodied in all the institutions of working-class self-help - the friendly societies and the savings clubs, the co-operatives and the trade unions and, above all, in the Labour Party itself, shaped as a great engine of working class emancipation, designed to impose on a wilful and heartless industrial machine, and secure in an elite-bound society, the common decencies with which people conducted their everyday lives, respecting each other and helping each other. Socialism has always been a way of measuring the actual against the potential, the immediate as against the possible condition of man. In the past it was always the cry that the fallen should rise.... But now that the fallen have risen - to more power, more wealth, more dignity, more choice in their lives than at any other time since the coming of the industrial way of life - socialists cannot discard their fundamental belief in the ability of ordinary people - thinking, choosing and organising - to embody their highest values in the life of society." Samuel (1960:9)

These different currents that co-existed over Clause 4 ran through all the topics that the New Left Review discussed, and the themes that it developed. They were particularly evident in the New Left Review's broader project, vis-a-vis the Labour Party, of unlocking 'contemporary facts' and developing socialist policies across a whole range of areas. Here, authors evaluated the advances, the limitations, and the socialist potential of the welfare sector [2] and of education [3]; they considered the record and prospects for town planning and for transport [4];

1 See Samuel (1960) and (1959)

2 See Sheila Lynd (1960); Peter Massie (1960); Dorothy Thompson (1960)

3 See Peter Newsam (1960); John Dixon (1960); John Thirwell (1960); Stuart Hall (1960)

4 See Dennis Butt (1960); John Hughes (1960b); Nick Faith (1960a); Lawrence Burton (1960)

they discussed industrial democracy both in the nationalised industries and in the private sector, considering how it could be extended. [1]

Different New Left Review authors had varied expectations of capitalism's future, and the potential for socialist change. After several years of apparent stability, British capitalism was entering a crisis in the early 1960s, and some New Left Review writers did consider its economic causes and political effects.[2] But whether capitalism was stable or no, New Left Review authors believed that real, socialist advances could be made. What was needed was socialist analysis and planning and, in Edward Thompson's eyes, the courage to make revolution occur. Inspiring people to work together to take conscious control of their lives - to build on past gains; to extend socialist values - this was how Edward Thompson described socialist campaigning. He was standing here as preacher, calling out to the faint-hearted that socialism was within reach. 'We are now constantly living on the edge of a revolutionary situation' he wrote, (and repeated). [3] And it was up to socialists to convert the unconverted.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, 'possibilism' was essential to new left thinking, and Edward Thompson's claim was not shouted down. He did have his critics: Sol Encel asked where 'the

1. See John Hughes (1960a); Royden Harrison (1960); Nick Faith (1960b).

2. Articles that touched on capitalism's crisis in the early 1960s included Frewen Martin (1961); William Norman (1961); Sam Spade (1961)

3. Edward Thompson (1960b:8) and (1960c )

dynamic for the breakthrough to come from if not from class antagonism (Encel, 1960:9); others were critical of Edward Thom pson's rhetoric, since it stood in the way of realistic strategies and, indeed, under standing.[1] Michael Kidron of the Socialist Labour League charged him with 'intellectual liberalism', divorced from socialist (i.e. 'working class') action.[2] But the spirit of Edward Thompson's claim survived these charges. For if, as both the Universities and Left Review and the New Reasoner had maintained, humanist values were essential to socialism, and if, through the force of their appeal, people could be inspired to leave apathy behind, then support for socialism could grow without any fundamental change in the conditions of people's lives.

The New Left Review and Nuclear Disarmament.

It was nuclear disarmament, more than any other cause, that promised to change people's hearts and minds and 'make socialists'. We have seen how, for both the New Reasoner and the Universities and Left Review the bomb was emblematic of the evils of capitalism, the most terrible feature of a system they opposed. The New Left Review carried on where these journals had left off, theorising the relationship between nuclear disarmament and socialism, considering both thepolitical implications of the unilateralist cause and the specialness of the nuclear disarmament movement. As with the debate on capitalist economics, this theorising was undertaken with Labour Party policy in mind.

1. See Peter Marris (1960) for example.

2. See Kidron (1961)

Edward Thompson believed particularly strongly in the liberating potential of nuclear disarmament. He had come to believe that campaigning for unilateralism and against NATO was a priority even over industrial struggle: it was the critical point of engagement between the people and capitalist class power. (Thompson, 1960a: 68). In his contributions to Out of Apathy and, particularly in his essay 'Outside the Whale',[1] Thompson developed this position, analysing the ideology that supported and legitimised NATO and the bomb on one hand, and the potential for change, on the other. He counterposed apathy and agency; 'exhausted imperialism' and non-alignment; detachment and solidarity; 'affluence' and utopia: 'Natopolitan ideology' or socialist humanism was, he maintained, the choice of our time.

Edward Thompson traced the birth of the nuclear disarmament movement back to 1956,when 'the spell of impotence' had been broken, and people had begun, slowly, to take responsibility for the times in which they lived. 'It was the threat of nuclear annihilation which made the quietists rebel', he wrote (Thompson, 1960d:189), and this rebellion could become a socialist rebellion as those protesters became more aware of the context that had created the bomb. Should these protesters succeed in forcing Britain out of NATO, then no less than a socialist revolution could ensue. He speculated:

> "The Americans might reply with economic sanctions. Britain would be faced with the alternatives of compliance or of a far-reaching re-orientation of trade. The dilemma would agitate the consciousness of the whole people not as an abstract theory of revolution but as an

1. See Thompson (1960d)

> actual and immediate political choice, debated in the factories, offices and streets. People would become aware of the historic choice presented to our country, as they became aware during the Second World War. Ideology and political antagonisms would sharpen. Events themselves would disclose to people the possibility of the socialist alternative; and if events were seconded by the agitation and initiatives of thousands of convinced socialists in every area of life, the socialist revolution would be carried through." (Thompson, 1960b:9)

He went on to state with great optimism that 'Of all the Western countries, Britain is perhaps the best placed to effect such a transition. The equilibrium here is most precarious, the Labour Movement least divided, the democratic socialist tradition most strong'. (Ibid:9). Indeed, the British socialist tradition, 'long and tenacious'; 'dogged, good-humoured, responsible, peaceable' was 'a tradition which could leaven the socialist world'. (Ibid:9). Whilst other writers did not express such confidence in the revolutionary potential of leaving NATO, they did share a belief in the radicalising effect of campaigning. The editorial in New Left Review 6 went so far as to say that CND was 'socialism by any other name'; it was the answer of those who were deeply disillusioned with the socialist politics that were on offer. There were two sides to this. Firstly, the bomb itself called for uncompromised opposition (not for Parliamentary manouvering), and secondly, the movement itself was an active one:

> ....CND had what many took to be the missing element in the politics of time - the swell from below, the ring of anti-Establishmentarianism, the self-activity and self-reliance, the converting zeal (unhinging fixed prejudices and opening minds), the participation and the comradeship .... 1956-60 has been 'The Thirties' of the present generation. (Editorial NLR 6:5)

Written at the time of the third Aldermaston march, the editorial celebrated the fact this movement was still growing:

> On each occasion a larger and larger proportion of people have roused themselves from an apparent apathy, to demonstrate and argue, learn, confront persuade and cajole. (NLR 8:cover)

Alongside the Clause 4 debate, nuclear disarmament was the other hotly contested area in Labour Party policy through 1960 and 1961. At the 1960 Labour Party conference at Scarborough, the delegates voted for unilateralism, and for the retention of Clause 4. Gaitskell, as we know, was opposed to both, and it was on unilateralism that he chose to take his stand: to get this vote reversed, he vowed to 'fight, fight and fight again'.[1] It was this vote that was charged with dividing the party and destroying its credibility as a party of rule.

In the months around the party conference, the New Left Review considered, and condemned, Labour's Draft Foreign and Defence Policy, and mapped out an alternative policy of 'positive neutrality' to take its place. They argued that Britain needed not merely to ban the bomb but abandon NATO: not merely to remove the bomb from British soil, but to transform the alliances that had lead to its installation everywhere. Writers in the New Left Review, as in the New Reasoner maintained that it was only by placing the bomb in the wider context of foreign and

1. From Labour Party (1960b). Gaitskell continued:
'We will fight and fight and fight again to bring back sanity and dignity, so that our Party with its great past may retain its glory and its greatness'.

and defence policy that its development could be understood, and its possession opposed.

John Rex and Peter Worsley in 'Campaign for a Foreign Policy',[1] provided, somewhat surprisingly, the only detailed consideration of this position that the New Left Review carried.

Other writers settled for analysing the Labour Party's foreign and defence policy, considering how unilateralism and withdrawal from NATO could themselves be achieved. Of key importance here was the question of how CND supporters could influence the Labour Party, especially when, post Scarborough, the conference's unilateralism vote came under fire. Before the conference, the journal made a very positive assessment of the successes so far. The editorial in New Left Review 4 described how debates on foreign policy and Clause 4 had:

> "..... eaten their way through in to the heart of the movement during the past few months. They provide the political opportunity for a reversal of direction in the Labour movement and such is the character of the debate which these issues have generated, that no affirmations of loyalty can lever them from the centre of the political stage. The basic orientation of policy, the question of the transition to a socialist society at home, and a foreign policy based on co-existence abroad, are before the Labour movement now in a sharper form than they have been since the end of the Labour Government at the beginning of the decade." (Editorial , NLR 4:2)

What the New Left had to do, post Scarborough, was ensure that the right did not succeed in reversing the vote , or indeed ignoring them when formulating policy.

1. Rex and Worsley (1960)

The NLR board, at their meeting on 8.9.60, discussed the Scarborough vote at length. They agreed that the case for positive neutralism had to be pressed for, but differed on how this could be the most effectively done. A whole range of attitudes to the Labour Party, the trade unions and socialist campaigning were expressed here.[1] John Hughes for example suggested that the new left get together with the old left around Tribune; Ron Meek argued that the new left should put pressure on the unions; Ralph Miliband argued that new lefters should all join the Labour Party; whilst Alan Hall warned that to concentrate too much on the debate in the Labour Party may lose them the debate outside it. And whilst the debate in the Labour Party was felt to be extremely important, members differed on how much of a success the 1960 vote was. Ralph Miliband thought that the Scarborough vote was 'the most remarkable breakthrough in 60 years', since the left had defeated the party leadership. Charles Taylor though (who wasn't at this meeting) thought it was a 'totally empty victory'; 'more of a disaster than a success'.[2] They all recognised though that to defend the vote would involve a fight in the party, a fight that could involve splitting the party and ousting Gaitskell. They considered too how the right and not the left could be given the responsibility for the disruption that this would cause. However, the NLR board was not prepared to explicitly urge the journal's readers to 'get in and push in the labour movement and the Labour Party'. On a vote, a motion to carry a

1. Minutes, NLR board, 8.9.60

2. Charles Taylor (interview)

special appeal in the journal urging readers to do this was defeated by 11 votes to 7. New Left Review 6, the first issue of the journal after Scarborough, did carry an editorial on the political implications of the Scarborough vote. In this editorial, the New Left Review proposed that the nuclear disarmament movement be a 'second front', taking the CND campaign to Labour Party meetings, deepening their arguments for positive neutralism, holding bigger demonstrations themselves.

In fact, the New Left Review carried very little on what a policy of 'positive neutralism' would look like and how, in detailed political terms, it could be achieved. What they printed rather more of were speculative statements on how nuclear disarmament could radicalise the Labour Party - at all levels. To quote from the editorial in New Left Review 6:

> "A party which took unilateralism seriously would be a very different thing from what it is ..... It would be one which had moved over from the steady four-year rhythm of electoral plodding, into the direct challenge and confrontation of established habits and attitudes: for unilateralism has to be argued for, as urgently from the Party rooms as it has, over the last three years, been argued from the Church Halls."
>
> (Editorial, NLR 6: 6)

The 'established habits and attitudes' that the editorial was referring to spanned the allegiance to the 'Western values, Western forms and institutions' on which Britain's current defence policy was based. Challenging these essentially capitalist institutions could clear the way for socialist values and for socialist 'forms and institutions'. And the activity of challenging them would wake the party up, forcing it to abandon the 'worn conventions' of decision making, to be more responsive to its own members, and to seek new and active support.

Behind the confident and critical writing of the New Left Review, problems loomed large. John Saville, in a letter to Nick Faith on 10.11.60, described how his 'main concern', in his first six months as chairman of the board, had been to 'prevent the whole thing falling apart because of the conflict between some of those I may call the older generation and the younger'. But even his efforts had not secured the 'personal and political unity' that he had hoped for. This conflict between generations was not, straightforwardly, a conflict between the New Left Review and the Universities and Left Review's editors and supporters, although it was at times perceived in that way. It was a conflict that was rooted in the historical and political experiences of different actors, and that was expressed through their divergent understandings of the new left movement and the role of the review. This conflict was exacerbated by the real political and cultural differences between London and 'the provinces'. Produced in London, and fairly London centred in the articles it carried, the New Left Review was thought to be too 'modern', too 'radical chic', to truly reflect the political mood elsewhere. [1] However the criticisms that non-London people made turned fairly rapidly to attacks, as they became increasingly angry at their own lack of control over editorial policy. And these attacks, in turn, made the work of editing the journal more difficult for an extremely hard-pressed Stuart Hall.

So what were the main issues that were contested? The major line of dissent was between the ex Communist Party historians, such as Edward Thompson, John Saville, Ralph Samuel, and the non-CP writers who focused on the 'culture and community theme' that Raymond Williams and the Universities and Left Review had pioneered. Whilst the historians stressed

1. Ralph Samuel and Nick Faith (interviews)

the importance of recognising the historical roots of socialism, and argued that the review should carry more historical writing, the tone of the review as a whole was truer to the contemporary emphasis of the Universities and Left Review.

Communist Party historians, Ralph Samuel recalled, regarded New Left Review writing as 'woolly' and lacking a theoretical basis.[1] Its defenders however thought that Edward Thompson and John Saville clung to a marxism that they could no longer define. With no dogma to protect or develop, the 'younger generation' could feel much freer in their thinking.[2] Other marxists, such as Dennis Butt, Stanley Mitchell, made similar criticisms of the New Left Review. These critics had a point. Marxist concepts and marxist language were largely absent from New Left Review writing. Reference was more often made to 'the bosses' than the capitalist class; to the 'commanding heights of the economy' than to monopoly capitalism; to 'the government' rather than the state; and to false or inhumane 'priorities' rather than exploitation and oppression. Stanley Mitchell was critical of the focus on 'felt', community experience, since he thought that it precluded theoretical analysis and, in its expansiveness, ignored class.[3] There was dissent, too, over the lack of East European material in the review. It was the loss of this that Edward Thompson, in particular, regretted.

Many of these differences were debated in the pages of the journal in a long, two-part review of Raymond Williams' The Long Revolution by Edward Thompson.[4]

1 Ralph Samuel and Edward Thompson (interviews)
2 Nick Faith (interview)
3 Stanley Mitchell (interview)
4 . Edward Thompson (1961a, b)

## The New Left Review and The Long Revolution

The Long Revolution was published in 1961, when the battle over nuclear disarmament was raging in the Labour Party, and when the left, suddenly feared, was very much under attack.[1]

Raymond Williams' new book met with an extremely hostile reception, far more so than Culture and Society had done.

> The degree of hostility was quite unforgettable. There was a full-scale attack of the most bitter kind in certain key organs. ..... It was a standard complaint that I had been corrupted by sociology, that I had got into theory. The fact is that it was perceived as a much more dangerous book.
>
> (Williams, 1979: 133-4)

It was not only non-socialists who took exception to Williams' book. The left, too, entered the fray, making its own criticisms both of Williams' ideas and of the politics that it might inspire. The tone of the left's attacks came out of the political atmosphere of those years. '..... the left in general', Williams recalled, 'had difficulty in restraining itself from frustrated point-scoring, as distinct from the expression of theoretical differences which have the object of mutual clarification so that one can move on' (Williams, 1979: 134-5). Their substance - and particularly the substance of Thompson's two-part review in the New Left Review - was based on very different understandings of the socialist tradition.

Raymond Williams took his title The Long Revolution from a sentence in Culture and Society. He set out to 'reinterpret and extend' (Williams, 1965b: 9) the ideas and values he had traced there, and explore the 'process of change'.

> It seems to me that we are living through a long revolution, which our best descriptions only in part interpret. It is a genuine revolution, transforming men and institutions; continually extended and deepened by the actions of millions, continually and variously opposed by explicit reaction and by the pressure of habitual forms and ideas. (Ibid: 10)

1. See Williams (1979: 134)

Very gradually, people were taking control of their own lives, 'without concessions of this right to any particular group, nationality or class' (Williams, 1965b: 10) 'Our whole way of life' was being slowly, but surely, transformed. Williams named three interconnected revolutions here: the democratic revolution; the industrial revolution; the cultural revolution. These revolutions were of enormous significance, and on them our understanding of 'the theoretical crisis, or our actual history, or the reality of our immediate condition and the terms of change' depended (Williams, 1965b: 13).

It was Raymond Williams' description of his project in a unitary way - 'our history'; 'our immediate condition'; 'our way of life' - that was the starting point of Edward Thompson's critique. He argued that there was not one tradition but two, a bourgeois tradition and a socialist tradition, and that Williams had been overwhelmingly concerned with the first. 'The Labour movement is credited from time to time with the creation of new institutions: but it is never credited with a mind' Thompson wrote (1961a: 31). Thompson's criticisms of Williams were drawn from this socialist tradition. Williams, he argued, had belied agency and eschewed class struggle in his descriptions of change. He had credited bourgeois writers at the expense of socialist writers, such as Morris and Marx, and of the historical movements of their day. He thought Williams' focus on communications was misplaced without an adequate analysis of ideology. And he believed that no 'common culture', however actively pursued, could 'dismantle the barriers of class' that stood in its way.

Raymond Williams had made some major criticisms of socialist ideas. It was 'the gravest error of socialism', he wrote, 'to propose a political and economic order, rather than a human order' (Williams, 1965b: 131):

> The integration of work and life, and the inclusion of the activities we call cultural in the ordinary social organisation, are the basic terms of an alternative form of society.
>
> (Ibid: 132)

In omitting these activities, socialism had limited itself 'to the terms of its opponents'. Williams argued that to understand any society we needed to draw the essential and historically varied connections between the different spheres in our lives; and to build a socialist society we had to develop an image of an 'alternative human order' to which we could aspire. But socialists had failed to do this, with the result that 'in the whole area of thinking about change in our society ..... this knot is tied' (Ibid: 367). Raymond Williams was attempting to untie this knot; to integrate culture, in particular, into an analysis of the present and a vision of the future. And in doing this, he believed he was giving voice to real, if thwarted, pressures for change.

Williams focused in his book on the 'system of communication',[1] or culture. He formulated the notion of 'structures of feeling' to describe how culture was lived at particular times. In other words, Williams was theorising the interest in 'felt' life that was so contentious in the New Left Review. (And he did see generations, rather than classes, as being responsible for the structures of feeling of the time). Nonetheless, Williams did not deny the structural basis of class divisions: he stated, for example, that no real classlessness could be achieved till capital was socially owned, and only then, too, could the discussion of class be set aside.

1. Williams also identified the 'system of generation and nurture', but did not consider it in any detail. He thought it possible that his own 'unproblematic' family experience had been responsible for this lack. See Williams (1979: 149-150)

Edward Thompson embarked on his review by stating that Raymond Williams was the new left's 'best man'. He praised his courage for continuing to work as an independent socialist right through the cold war, when so many others, including himself, 'had simply disengaged'. He argued though that the cost of doing this had been that Williams had dissociated himself from 'the major socialist tradition in this country'. At that time

> "The follies of proletcult, the stridency of crude class reductionism which passed for Marxist criticism in some circles, the mixture of quantitative rhetoric and guilt casuism which accompanied apologetics for Zhdanovism - all these seemed to have corroded even the vocabulary of socialism. With a compromised tradition at his back, and with a broken vocabulary in his hands, he did the only thing that was left to him: he took over the vocabulary of his opponents, followed them into the heart of their own arguments, and fought them to a standstill in their own terms. He held the roads open for the young, and now they are moving down them once again. And when, in '56, he saw some of his socialist contemporaries coming back to his side, his smile must have had a wry edge."
>
> (Thompson, 1961a: 27)

He charged Williams with not reassessing the socialist tradition now that the cold war had abated. Thompson argued that neither of Williams' books engaged in a serious way with marxism, even though Marx had much to offer. For Marx had formulated a theory of history which could be understood as 'the study of relationships between elements in a whole way of life'; and human creativity was the premise on which his theory was built. In addition, Marx's theory had very real advantages over Williams' because it could account more adequately for the process of change. Thompson drew an analogy here between conflict and struggle. For Williams' 'way of life' he substituted 'firstly a way of conflict', and then 'a way of struggle'.

Raymond Williams did not agree with this formulation of Edward Thompson's. Whilst he recognised that both class conflict and class struggle were essential conditions of our 'whole way of life', he maintained that it was important to differentiate between the two.

"There is no question that class conflict is inevitable within the capitalist social order: there is an absolute and impassable conflict of interests around which the whole social order is built and which it necessarily in one form or another reproduces. The term 'class struggle' properly refers to the moment at which that structural conflict becomes a conscious and mutual contention, an overt engagement of forces. Any socialist account of culture must necessarily include conflict as a structural condition of it as a whole way of life. Without that it would be wrong. But if you define the whole historical process as struggle, then you have to elude or foreshorten all the periods in which conflict is mediated in other forms, in which there are provisional resolutions or temporary compositions of it. I was after all particularly conscious of this, because the fifties in England had precisely been a period - this was what the whole political argument was about then - of marked diminution of class struggle in a situation in which there was nevertheless class conflict. Unless one could make this distinction, one was in danger of falling into the rhetoric of 'a whole way of struggle', which was peculiarly unfitted to a time in which what was permanently there as conflict was expressed in terms precisely other than struggle."

(Williams, 1979: 135)

This was an important point. Part of the reason for the lack of popularity for traditional marxist thinking in the left in the 1950 s must surely have been the apparent irrelevance of an appeal to class struggle in such a quiescent and 'unheroic' decade. Indeed, Williams recalled, the fifties 'appeared to have neutralised and incorporated many of the very institutions of struggle to which appeal was being made' (Williams, 1979: 135-6). Of the debates between the right and left in the labour movement,

"..neither really answered to the social experience to which they were attempting to speak. That is what explains the no doubt exaggerated judgement that socialism had almost wholly lost any contemporary meaning. What I was trying to say was that it was above all necessary not to pretend that there was a strong, well-rooted socialist movement which was in a position to change the society and that the first duty was affiliation to it. It was a time, on the contrary, when the real need was to contrast very rapidly-changing social relations with the prevailing formulations which were helpless before them."

(Williams, 1979: 172-3).

The unpopularity of Marx must have been reSponsible, in part, for the tone of Edward Thompson's writing. 'Oh, that book! Do we really have to go

over all that old nineteenth century stuff again?' (Thompson, 1961a: 31) was the response he anticipated for quoting Das Kapital. But Marx, Thompson maintained, had much to offer non-marxists in the new left. The marxist tradition could help them clarify their own thinking, to work through their confusions, and reconsider their worst misconceptions. He hoped for a dialogue in the new left between marxists and those inspired by Raymond Williams on the issues - of power, communication, class, ideology - that were central to their different ways of thinking.

> "Too much of our thinking had been simply a flux of ideas and attitudes; year by year names come forward, are cheered, are dropped, and are replaced by new names: themes are taken up and drop from our hands while half-understood and while still not broken down into policy and into programmatic form. The flux of ideas is good: but there is also the suspicion of the jargon of a coterie, and at a certain point the desire for 'openness' can become an excuse for unprincipled thinking."
>
> (Thompson, 1961b: 37)

He maintained that they did share some common ground - such as their commitment to a genuinely democratic and moral socialism - on which an open dialogue could be built. But it was also very evident that Thompson was less than happy with Williams' emphasis on 'communication', on 'common culture', and heavily critical of some of the politics that this had apparently inspired. He began the second part of his review by stating, very boldly, that

> "It may be that Mr Williams' originality demands free play outside a tradition within which so much is now confused. But if others accept his vocabulary and his conceptual framework, without sharing his allegiances, they may come up with very different results. For between these 'systems', and that 'way of life' I fear that they may forget that at the centre there are men in relation with one another: that 'organising the industrial process' involves ownership, that ownership involves power, and that both perpetually feed property-relationships and dominative attitudes in every field of life. And that between this system and a human system there lies, not just a further long episode of 'expansion' and 'growth', but a problem of power."
>
> (Thompson, 1961b: 34)

Edward Thompson's stated intention in his review of The Long Revolution of opening up a genuine dialogue between the marxists and the 'culture and community' school in the new left did not, and indeed could not, succeed. His tone had been too judgemental, too authoritarian, to spark off a good-willed debate. And relationships between people on the review were already too complex and too fraught for genuinely open discussion. Thompson's own humour was not helped by the fact that the second part of his review appeared with page two missing. (It was printed at the end of the subsequent issue). This was felt as yet another instance of the perceived incompetence of the London team.

Issue 10, where this mistake was made, came out in July-August 1961, in the wake of the Stockport conference. This conference had been attended by board members, journal contributors and representatives from the clubs, and 'common themes' - and the future of the journal - had been discussed. There, the many resentments and differences had erupted, and arguments were raging still. To understand why the Stockport conference had been so explosive, it is necessary to look more closely at how the review was produced: at how administrative, business and editorial decisions were made. We have already seen how, right from the review's inception, these decisions had never been easy. There were always conflicting claims on the review, and these claims caused personal tensions that became more acute with time.

## The Production of the New Left Review

A number of working groups were involved in administering the New Left Review. The NLR board; the editorial executive; the business committee all participated in the editorial and financial decisions that the editor and the business manager carried through. But this participation was not easy. Where authority lay, who was accountable to whom, who should do what, were not resolved when the journal was first published, and were contested as its success (and popularity amongst those involved) hung in the balance. This uncertainty was exacerbated by the precarious finances of the journal.

As with any new venture, it was hard to assess quite how solvent the New Left Review was. In a situation of latent and not so latent conflict, and in the face of inadequate accounting information (and unrealistic expectations of what the figures, at so early a stage in the journal's life, could say) the apparent financial insecurity of the review became a source of further dispute. Nick Faith, a member of the business committee, tried to warn of this.

> "..... to cry 'wolf' about a financial position before you have concrete evidence to back it up results in a state of endemic crisis in which true troubles are concealed,"

he wrote to John Saville on 20.6.60. It was, he argued here, too early to tell what the cost of producing the New Left Review actually was. Meanwhile, the number of pages and illustrations, the size of print runs and inclusion of adverts, were argued out between the board, the editorial executive and the business committee. [1]

1 The print of no.4 was 7,500, and of no.5 was 8,000. The journal had nearly 3,000 subscribers. On the grounds of cost, it was decided that issue 6 should only contain 68 pages. (Minutes, NLR board, 8-9.10.60)

The New Left Review employed a business manager, who until February 1961 was Janet Hase. She and her successors had an enormous job on their hands, and had to work in tense, busy and sometimes frantic conditions. As with the political differences between people, the financial difficulties that the journal was in were sometimes blamed on individual characters, rather than the structure of the group. Lack of clarity about what the business manager's job entailed left her with some control over the running of the journal. When she did not carry out the (sometimes conflicting) demands made on her, she was perceived as having sole authority on the review.

Two members of the business committee, John Saville and Nick Faith, attempted to take this situation in hand. When Janet Hase announced her decision to resign, they saw the opportunity to appoint someone fresh who would, from the start, be directly accountable to the business committee. And John Saville pushed on the board to bring 'effective decisions in(to) the hands of first, the business committee, and then the executive'. [1]

At the end of its first year, the journal's finances were not in too bad a state, despite all these fears. John Saville certainly believed that in a 'no-change' situation, the journal would remain solvent for another year.[2] However, the apparent solvency of the journal at the end of 1960 did not mean that it was felt to be a success. The NLR's board, executive and business committee entered 1961 with rather less enthusiasm than they had entered 1960.[3] Those involved in the New Left Review, like so many working,

1. Letter from John Saville to Nick Faith, 10.11.60. How unmanageable the job of business manager was came across in the various letters that Nick Faith and John Saville exchanged.
2. Minutes, NLR board meeting, 7-8.1.61
3. Minutes, NLR board meeting, 7-8.1.61

political groups, had failed to recruit new active members, and to retain the active participation of some older members, in all areas of its work. From my reading of the minutes, it would appear that the journal was produced by a small and overworked group at the centre, whose work was inhibited by the criticism they received from other executive members, and from the large but divided editorial board. The executive suffered from the competing demands made of it; and board members felt frustrated by what they perceived as their minimal influence on policy, on the one hand, and the decline in the number of active board members, on the other.

Not even Stuart Hall, the editor, was happy with the journal as it was. He opened his statement to the first board meeting of 1961 by saying

> "It is difficult, at this point, to see much more than the good ideas that got lost, the suggestions that were written too late, the areas of concern untouched and the promised special studies which are still being studied."[1]

In the course of 1961, the many tensions- and difficulties that had festered in 1960 burst into the cruel light of day. Old scores were raised, old allegiances defended, as the editorial policy of the journal was contested anew.

The future production of the journal was discussed, at length, at the editorial board meeting on 15-16.4.61. It was agreed here that the journal would be better served by an editorial team, in closer contact with each other and the production of the journal, than the editorial executive had been under the editorship, still, of a single editor. Stuart Hall hoped that this team would have the space to develop the 'distinctive voice, and distinctive kinds of socialist journalism'

1. Stuart Hall 'Report on the journal'. Editorial board, 7-8.1.61

that had eluded the old executive.[1] It was decided too that the board should be kept. It would 'retain the final responsibility for appointing the Editor and it would also have responsibility for continuing to discuss the important ideas and themes which the journal would take up',[2] though quite how was postponed for a further meeting. This meeting also considered the future direction of the journal, and its relationship to the left clubs. Discussion on the first of these topics had evolved around Stuart Hall's proposal that the journal be published monthly.[3] Monthly publication, Stuart Hall argued, would enable the New Left Review to combine the full-length and more theoretical articles it carried (such as Edward Thompson's 'Revolution', Charles Taylor's 'What's Wrong With Capitalism?')[4] with the journalistic style comment on 'more specific or current topics and events, or for features on a particular subject'. It would be produced, not by an editorial executive, as at present, but by an editorial team, '..... more closely centred on the production of the journal itself, and less eclectically selected from the Editorial Board to represent various strands within the New Left'.[5] The board would still meet, but not to edit the journal from a distance. Instead, it would write, discuss, and potentially become more active, giving more political leadership than it had done so far. Left unsettled was the thorny question of what the board's relationship to the team should be.

The meeting took this proposal seriously, and resolved to work out cost and layout. It did offer one way out of present difficulties, and did therefore seem worthwhile. It became a measure to hold crisis at bay. Edward Thompson had sent a letter of resignation from the board to this

1. Mimeographed letter from Stuart Hall to Edward Thompson, 20.6.61
2. Minutes, editorial board, 15-16.4.61
3. Stuart Hall first proposed this at the NLR board meeting, 7-8.1.61
4. See Thompson (1960 b) and Taylor (1960)
5. Stuart Hall; 'Notes on the monthly', discussed by the editorial executive, 8.4.61

meeting, and it had been read in his absence. This letter chronicled Edward Thompson's dissatisfactions with the journal, and his thoughts on the way ahead. It reported how he had felt a 'lack of accord' with the journal from its inception, and had already attempted to resign from the editorial executive. [1] He went on to describe how he had been an unhappy passenger since that time, retaining only a 'negative, breaking influence upon Stuart', and no real influence on policy. He explained his negative effect here in terms of 'some undefined status in the journal, derived from the pre-merger days'. He explained his lack of positive influence in terms of the powerlessness of the board. He had a further criticism of the board itself: that it had 'failed in most of its responsibilities to the active movement'. He went on to argue that the merger had failed. The different elements in the board had turned out to be too different; no new left journal 'could have emerged which carried the support of all tendencies on board'. Considering what the future of the journal, and the board, should be, he opted for a much extended 'New Left on the model of a Fabian society ..... with defined educational and political functions, and with an elected executive and sub-committees'.

Despite his plea to be allowed to resign, Edward Thompson was persuaded to become the chairman of the board on John Saville's resignation. The board, as we shall see, committed itself anew to promoting new left activities, and Edward Thompson was prepared to put his energies into these.

By June 1961, Stuart Hall had also decided to resign. In a long letter to Edward Thompson that was mimeographed and sent round to several other

1. Letter from Edward Thompson to John Saville, read at the editorial board meeting 15.4.61

board members, Stuart Hall told of the enormous and competing pressures he had been under. He needed to resign, he wrote, before he was totally exhausted and utterly drained. The personal cost of being editor was very graphically described. So too was the way that the New Left Review had been an unviable project from its inception. The lack of priorities, the unrealistic expectations, the problems of organisation, and the sheer volume of work, were competing pressures that, together, effectively crippled the journal. The lack of brief meant that every criticism was felt as 'a general criticism, a root criticism embracing everything, calling everything into question'. [1] The journal, he wrote, was burning out its key people in a futile attempt to achieve the impossible.

Stuart Hall laid some blame on Edward Thompson for the difficulties he, and the journal, had faced. He had felt Edward Thompson to be an overbearing presence, sitting in judgement and recording the journal's inevitable political and administrative failures. Stuart Hall did not think he was tough enough, or well-organised enough, to continue as editor any longer. He hoped his resignation would help clear the air; and although he was prepared to advise on future plans, and would not actually resign till the board found someone to replace him, he was too exhausted and dispirited to carry on as before. [2] Nor was Stuart Hall alone in feeling dispirited and worn down. There was a crisis in confidence in the 'centre', in London, that was hindering the new left as a whole.

The crisis in 'the centre' did undermine the movement of left clubs. Although the New Left Review had never been an organising journal for the clubs, it did serve as a focus for club members. It was the major forum

1. Letter from Stuart Hall to Edward Thompson, 20.6.61:2
2. Raymond Williams recalled the enormous pressure Stuart Hall was under and the lack of backing he received in Williams (1979:365)

for new left ideas; the journal's editor and board members were the major speakers at new left club meetings; and the office, in London, was a drop-in centre for visiting new left supporters. Being 'more than a journal but not quite a movement' [1] was not conducive to the confidence of either the journal or the clubs. Quite how involved, and how responsible the journal should be for the clubs was one of the unsettled priorities that made the editor's job so impossible. The clubs meanwhile set up a separate co-ordinating body and, for a short time, produced a clubs' bulletin, but they never achieved the autonomy that would have spared them from the crisis of the review.

## The Left Clubs

I have already described how new left people started up clubs in the towns where they lived, outside London, from 1959 on. By July 1959, there were five; and in September, as we saw at the beginning of this chapter, representatives met and agreed to set up a new left standing committee that would co-ordinate club activities. The number of clubs grew rapidly over the following year: by the following July there were 37. This standing committee organised the first left clubs' conference, held in May, 1960. This conference discussed co-ordination between the clubs; the relationship between the clubs and the labour movement; the aims and policies of the review. [2] It agreed, once again, to have a clubs' committee (renamed the national clubs' committee), and gave it the twin tasks of bringing out a clubs' bulletin, and co-ordinating club activities. They decided, too, that the clubs should bring out a 'statement of aims', a general policy document that would include 'all the points on which the clubs were united'. This statement was not to be a clubs' constitution;

1. New Reasoner (1959). 'Notes to Our Readers', NR 10.128
2. From a circular from John Rosenblatt and John Thirlwell, two of the club representatives, to the clubs.

instead it was to be 'permissive only and not binding on existing clubs nor those that grow up in future'.[1] The sub-committee that was drafting the statement was to report back to the second left clubs' conference in December.

The clubs, as I have mentioned, did have much to gain from co-ordination. Problems arose though over how far the clubs should be not simply co-ordinated, but organised too. The clubs, first and foremost, had been set up as forums for the discussion of socialist ideas. Typically, these discussions took place around fairly formal meetings, where a new left 'expert' would introduce a topic, and then be questioned from the floor. Clubs also set up study groups on particular topics, such as colonialism, or workers' control. One group, which was closely connected to the Aberdeen left club, was a group of women who called themselves the 'Beauvoirites', after Simone de Beauvoir. They discussed the position of women - and were critical of others in the new left for avoiding or misconceiving this.[2]

Speakers' tours, regionally co-ordinated, proved to be the most cost and time effective ways of arranging meetings with visiting speakers. Regional committees were set up fairly rapidly, and in addition to co-ordinating meetings, they also exchanged exhibitions and organised regional schools. Co-ordination of the discussion side of the new left took place at the national level too. Tours were arranged for visiting speakers, for exhibitions, on special topics. The national clubs' committee, with the NLR board, also organised week-long summer schools.[3] Selling new left literature - the journal, the various new left pamphlets, some of which the clubs themselves produced - was another task that the clubs fulfilled. Again, this benefitted from some co-

1 From a circular sent out by John Rosenblatt, n.d.
2 From a conversation with Lois Kemp, one of the group's participants. Gradually, The Second Sex was being discovered.
3 The first of these on 'The Politics of the New Left' was held in Guildford, Surrey, September 1960

ordination, both regional and national. Although the clubs did not perform this job as well as the business committee would have liked, the willingness to sell literature was, in principle, there.[1]

Despite the obvious benefits of national co-ordination, the national clubs' committee did not win the clubs' easy support. Again and again, the committee sent out circulars to the clubs to supply information, and indeed their affiliation fees, without which the committee would be unable to meet. This bad response from the clubs to the committee was a sign of their ambivalence to what potentially was not only a co-ordinating committee, but an organising one too.[2] The clubs were involved in active politics: they supported the CND and sometimes too the DAC and the Committee of 100. Some participated in action against colonialism, and some were involved in labour movement campaigns.

The national clubs' committee did attempt to unite the clubs behind a common 'statement of aims'. It hoped to pin down the ideas, including the campaigning ideas, that the new left shared. On the basis of submission received from individual clubs, the committee drew up a draft statement of aims, which was then debated in the clubs' journal Viewpoint.

> ^ The origins of the new left lie in an accumulating dissatisfaction with many features of the contemporary world and the failure of the labour movement, in its theoretical and practical work, to provide an effective challenge,^

the draft began.[3] It went on to express its support for common ownership;

1 The clubs sold approximately 250 copies per issue. See letter from Nick Faith to John Saville, 21.4.61

2 A meeting of the Scottish committee of left clubs, 4.6.60, recorded the Edinburgh club's concern that a committee be set up in London at all.

3 New Left Clubs (1960), Statement of Aims, December

for nuclear disarmament; for racial, and somewhat surprisingly, for sexual equality. It picked up the 'culture and community' theme, stating

> "We believe that there are few cultural issues from which questions of political morality can be separated and we seek to free the nation's cultural and recreational life, education and the arts and sciences from the distorting pressures of the capitalist system."

The left clubs were described as places 'where socialist values and socialist comradeship are practised', fostering 'an alternative way of life as part of the challenge to capitalism'. But the statement ran into difficulties when it attempted to describe how the clubs were to campaign for their aims. The sub-committee tried to capture these differences in the sentence: 'Where appropriate we shall take action through existing organisations, but where necessary we shall promote independent action'. At issue here was what was meant by 'independent action'. Whilst supporters were assured that the new left would not become 'another mere political party', 'independent action' was not further defined. Despite the collaboration of the clubs in drawing up this statement, the work that had gone into it, and its apparently uncontroversial content, it was not adopted at the clubs' conference in December. Instead, the clubs voted there to adopt <u>no</u> statement of aims at all. [1]

The clubs, like the NLR board, were finding it difficult to agree over what new left campaigning should entail. They disputed both what they should do vis-a-vis the Labour Party, and how organised they should be. Whilst some members resisted any pressure to organise the new left on party lines, others argued that this was just what the new left should do; whilst some saw Labour Party membership as a sure road to political

1 The minutes do not record why the clubs voted in this way. John Rex (interview) thought that the club representatives regarded a statement of aims as too Leninist, and therefore unacceptable.

annihilation, others appealed for all new left supporters to join. The clubs, from their inception, had given serious consideration to this. (The first day of the first left clubs' conference in May 1960 had been spent discussing the role of the new left in the broader labour movement. The consensus there had been one of limited support for the Labour Party). They never agreed that all club members should be urged to join the Labour Party. Club members disagreed over whether the Labour Party could ever be a socialist party and, if so, how this could be achieved. Some thought that the new left should take their ideas to the labour movement and the Labour Party; others that they should hold their own ground; some argued that the new left should adopt an 'entrist' line vis-a-vis the Labour Party; and others that the new left should remain relatively or even totally independent from it. There was some regional variation here. Several of the Scottish clubs (Aberdeen, Dundee, Glasgow) were quite strongly committed to the Labour Party. In these clubs, either the majority of club members, or the dominant people, were in the Labour Party, and argued that the new left should work through it. In both Aberdeen and Glasgow, club members stood as Parliamentary candidates for Labour.[1]

There was regional variation too in how many new lefters were active in the trade unions, although trade union membership appeared to have been weaker than Labour Party membership overall. This relative weakness in trade union membership reflected the middle class composition of the new left. The limitations of this had always been recognised, right from the earliest days of the Universities and Left Review club. Sheila Benson, the secretary of the club, recalled how

> "a lot of attempts were made to increase working class membership. I'm not sure I believed this was feasible, but certainly I half believed it. I remember going to working men's clubs, and Labour

1. Sandy Hobbs (interview). He was secretary of both the Aberdeen and Dundee clubs. Neil Carmichael and Norman Buchan were successful new left parliamentary candidates in Glasgow, and Bob Hughes in Aberdeen North.

> clubs, with trade union contacts I knew, to speak to people to see if they would be interested. They weren't I don't think. Oh, one or two emerged and became 'the working class bloke we've got', but I don't think they emerged through my contact necessarily. I remember trying, and other people I knew also tried."
>
> (Sheila Benson, interview)

A concerted effort was made in the North of England too. There, a group of new lefters including John Saville and Jim Roche and some local trade unionists, brought out a monthly newsletter, Searchlight, for union members. This carried a range of articles on the relevance of topics such as Clause 4, or nuclear disarmament, to industrial workers. But this bulletin did not survive long. With a circulation of just two hundred, and failing to secure the active involvement of the trade unionists whose support it needed, it ran to only four issues, from January to April 1960. In the summer of 1960, a northern industrial committee was set up in another attempt to promote new left ideas in the trade union movement. It planned a whole series of day schools, but again with little success. The clubs' committee tried to encourage 'work in the industrial field'. It was suggested that if clubs were to appoint a representative who would be responsible for corresponding with the industrial committee and for bringing the notice of any new left 'industrial' work to workers and trade unionists in the club area, this should strengthen the influence of the new Left generally and help clubs to root themselves more firmly in their own areas. [1]

This was not, though, a decision that had been taken by the conference that had just been held, and it did not meet with very much response. The new left was a predominantly young movement, with a large student membership. 'The original stimulus behind the Clubs came in the main from the universities' wrote Harold Silver (1960:70). In the non-university towns (which were also towns with large working class populations) 'the kind of

1. Circular to the clubs from the left clubs' committee, n.d. (c.Dec.1960)

impetus that has so far built the new left is either non-existent, weak or inarticulate'. (Ibid:70). The majority of clubs were in university towns and some, such as Aberdeen, Oxford, Exeter, were organised from the universities. Only a very small minority of club members were working class and/or active in trade unions. In Aberdeen, there were 'probably not more than five or six who were ordinary union members', out of membership of around 30, recalled Sandy Hobbs (interview). In Dundee, on the other hand, where the university membership was relatively smaller, there was a stronger trade union presence. But the Dundee Club was also fairly successful. As Sandy Hobbs commented:

> "It may be not at all coincidental that the Dundee Club started later, ended at the same time, and never had the strength of membership. It is possible that the kind of club we were capable of having (and envisaged) was of necessity an intellectual thing, and because there weren't sufficient people around in Dundee it didn't quite take off."
>
> (Sandy Hobbs, interview)

That the clubs had been set up to provide a forum for the clarification of ideas, proved to be both their strength and their weakness.

> "What happened was the amount of time that people were prepared to give to discussion was relatively small. There was a time when the clubs were beginning when speakers were coming, when there was quite a good attendance. But for people who wanted to be politically active there was so much else to do, CND for example, and the Labour Party Young Socialists ..... These were also very exciting as you felt you achieved something when you won a vote at conference ..... You didn't have this sense of achievement in the left clubs. The number of people who were capable of continuing to be involved in discussions was quite small."
>
> (Sandy Hobbs, interview)

And for the bulk of people who came, Sandy Hobbs recalled, 'the new left was one of the many things they were involved in. There was a much smaller group that I belonged to that felt that the new left came first'.

Simon Rosenblatt made a similar point when considering whether the clubs could grow. He commented that 'the majority of Clubs do no more than talk' (Rosenblatt, 1960:72), and went on to argue that this was not enough. The discussions the clubs had, he thought, could seem futile, not least because they were never recorded and, all too often, didn't reach beyond the people in the room.

The clubs, to varying degrees, were involved in some active campaigning at the local and the national level. As with the journal, the Labour Party's Scarborough Conference was something of a milestone here. The co-ordinating committee urged all the 40 clubs to send a delegation to this, both to participate in the demonstration that CND was holding, and to help with the New Left Review's daily bulletin.[1] And after the conference the clubs, like the NLR board and the CND, considered how the unilateralism vote could be defended. John Rex and John Thirlwell, of the co-ordinating committee, sent a 'call to political action' to all the new left clubs, shortly after Scarborough.[2] They urged people to join the Labour Party and attend Labour Party meetings so that the unilateralist case would be made there. They also called on the New Left Review to publish a broadsheet on nuclear disarmament, to be sold at Labour Party and trade union meetings. This broadsheet (The Great Debate Begins)[3] was published, in part, because many in the new left felt that the unilateralist case had been put very badly at conference.

1. This Week was produced by the NLR and helpers in 1960, 1961 and 1962. It was a novel venture, and other groups were to copy it in later years
2. Circular to left clubs from John Rex and John Thirlwell, 10.10.60
3. Left Clubs Committee / New Left Review (1960). The Great Debate Begins, October 1960

"There seemed no-one prepared vigorously to state that unilateral disarmament was to be only one of a number of steps towards a fundamentally different foreign policy. That unilateralism meant not only renunciation but denunciation - of nuclear weapons, of the Western alliances, and in fact of all military alliances and power blocs.
The new left deserves a measure of blame for the poverty of the case presented. We ourselves have neither thought hard enough about the implications of our policy, nor worked hard enough to persuade others of its viability."[1]

John Rex and John Thirlwell's concern here for more serious consideration to be given to the case for nuclear disarmament was one that new left people, in all likelihood, shared. But their call for new left supporters to join the Labour Party was far more contentious - and was never settled. Alongside the debate on whether or not to join the Labour Party, another proposal that the left clubs form a 'national society of socialists', more of a united, campaigning body closer to a political party than the clubs currently were. This was being argued for particularly strongly by the Fife Socialist League - the independent socialist discussion group that was formed in 1957. Since the Fife Socialist League did differ in interesting ways from the left clubs, it would be worthwhile to look at it in slightly more detail here.

The Fife Socialist League was not a left club, and was never completely integrated into the clubs' network. A more direct response to the events of 1956 than the other left clubs, it predated the clubs and, in terms of local support, it outstripped them. Its first noticeable victory was winning the seat on Ballingry council; which was followed by polling nearly 5,000 votes in the 1959 general election. In the local elections in June 1961, the Fife Socialist League contested five seats, and won two (both in wards where the only other candidate was standing as a Communist.[2]

1 John Rex and John Thirlwell in Viewpoint 2, October 1960-1
2. See The Socialist, Vol.2, No.3, June 1961

The Fife Socialist League was more of an active campaigning group than the left clubs. Following Lawrence Daly's election on to Ballingry council, it became very involved in council affairs.

The league's independence from the Labour Party and the Communist Party did not change over time. On Labour's defeat in the 1959 election, Lawrence Daly argued that

> "The defeat of the Tories, however, will not be achieved merely by changing the balance of forces within the Labour Party. There are millions of people in Britain and young people especially to whom the Labour Party is absolute anathema. New forces with new ideas, and a fresh approach to Socialist policies, have much more chance of winning these people for a Socialist programme in the atomic age."[1]

He also saw a greater chance that the Fife Labour Party would be changed from pressure from outside rather than inside.

In February 1960, the league brought out the first issue of its monthly, The Socialist, a small, duplicated newsletter that was between five and eight pages in length. Sent out free to the league's 350 members, this newsletter carried news about the league and other organisations - such as the CND and the DAC - that it supported, and short articles on a range of topics, Scottish, British and international, that people sent in. It had a distinctly Scottish flavour (Burns was often given the last word). And it carried articles on topics, such as one on women in politics, that the NLR did not really consider at all. This particular article on women in politics was written by Jean McCrindle, who was an active member of the league and, for a time, the secretary of the Scottish left clubs co-ordinating committee. She described how many of the women in the league

1. Lawrence Daly (1960), The Socialist, Vol.1, No.1, February: 1-2

had felt 'inadequate' when campaigning in the election, lacking the knowledge to argue well. She maintained that women should know 'about such things as the hydrogen bomb, when the policy that a Government adopts affects their children and their children's children.[1] Her appeal then was to women as mothers, first and foremost. She did not consider providing child-care so that women could go to meetings, or what it was about politics that made women feel inadequate. Nonetheless she, and other women in the league, did articulate a gender difference, and think about how to change it.

Whilst Fife Socialist League members were in no doubt about the need for an independent socialist campaigning group (and did adopt a statement of aims),[2] the left clubs were struggling with organisation. At the second left clubs' conference in December 1960, the same set of people were elected onto the clubs' committee, with the exceptions only of a new treasurer (Bob Alston) and a new pamphlets editor (Alan Hall).[3] Communication between this committee and the clubs did not improve over the ensuing months. Clubs were not very good at communicating activities or supplying information, and Viewpoint, the clubs' bulletin, did not survive very long. The New Left Review journal did not give very much help to the clubs. It carried advertisements and listing for the clubs;

1 Jean McCrindle (1960)

2 This included unilateral nuclear disarmament, the abolition of racial and religious discrimination, a nationalisation programme to secure a 'socialist economy', extension of state welfare, and establishing a 'democratic republican government and a Scottish parliament'. (From The Socialist, Vol. , No.3, April 1960

3 Minutes, left clubs conference, 3-4.12.60

writers of articles spoke at the clubs; and Stuart Hall at least was glad to hear comments from the clubs and to consider letters for publication.[1] But it was not the clubs' journal. Instead, it was independent from them, trying not only to serve club members but to reach readers, and fulfill demands of its own. In theory, the NLR board was more involved with the left clubs. Board members spoke at left club meetings. Some, such as Ken Alexander in Aberdeen, and John Rex in Leeds, were prominent members of their local clubs. The board also organised some specific projects, such as summer schools, or sales of pamphlets, jointly with the clubs. In practice, very few board members were active in their local clubs..[2]

By the early months of 1961, all of the new left's organising groups were struggling to survive. The group which produced the New Left Review from the London office was in crisis. The board was uncertain of its responsibilities to the journal and the movement, and in disarray. The clubs were ambivalent about their own organisation, and about the journal. And the journal was neither the journal of the clubs nor, straightforwardly, a journal for them. In April 1961, a meeting of the NLR board decided to organise a weekend conference where the board and the clubs together could discuss the direction of the new left. This conference took place in June 1961. Here, club representatives and board members met to discuss all aspects of the new left, devoting the first day to discussion of new left themes, and the second to the clubs and the review, and the relationship between them. This conference was not particularly well attended by the

1. Letter from Janet Hase to left club secretaries, 28.2.61

2. In a letter from Dennis Butt and Ralph Samuel to the new left board, 14.7.61, They listed a sorry chronicle board members' lack of involvement in the clubs.

clubs: only 13 representatives were there.[1] Nonetheless, disappointments and disagreements were such that all aspects of the journal's work came under fire. It had the effect of opening the floodgates to keenly felt criticism of the new left, and, in particular, the New Left Review.

In the face of much heated debate, this conference set up a 'troika committee' with representatives from the board, the clubs and the conference, to examine those aspects of the new left's work of which criticisms had been made. This committee met two weeks later. It had nine members: Stuart Hall and Frances Kelly for the journal; Nick Faith and Dennis Butt and Ralph Samuel for the board; Bob Alston and Simon Rosenblatt for the clubs; and Harold Silver and Edward Thompson from the conference. Representatives (somewhat predictably) disagreed on what the relationship between the clubs and the journal should be. The club representatives commented on how the clubs were losing momentum. They called on the journal to carry more 'sense of movement', and to do this soon, before the movement collapsed. Stuart Hall replied however that this was a very hard thing to do. It created problems for the journal, inhibiting the editor on the one hand, and limiting the appeal of the journal to the majority of the readers outside the clubs.[2]

Stuart Hall elaborated on these points in an appendix he wrote to the committee's report. He cited the complaints that had been made about the

1. Minutes, left clubs national committee meeting, 11.6.61

2. New Left Review, Memorandum: to Editorial Board, Left Clubs Committees (n.d.). This was the report of the troika committee that had met on 24.6.61. It was written by Edward Thompson.

journal by people in the movement: it was 'pitched above their heads', and carried too little on the clubs themselves. He replied that the New Left Review had a wide and varied audience, and had tried (unsuccessfully) to meet the differing expectations that this audience had. He thought the journal could never meet the expectations that the clubs had of it because it never would be their journal. It would carry more club news; it would give the clubs more space as the movement grew, but it could never take the place of a clubs' bulletin, produced by the clubs themselves. The New Left Review needed to retain a 'degree of independence', 'an identity and thrust of its own'.

The troika committee also discussed the problems of administration vis-a-vis the clubs and the journal. Everyone agreed that the office, in London, was heavily overloaded.

> "To many people, especially in London, the Editor is the new left; and his telephone number is the only means of communication with the new left. If CND wants co-operation, they ring Stuart. Contributors, London Club members, foreign visitors or provincial readers may ring or drop in ..... Stuart himself is on demand 7 days a week to speak, to talk over Club or student problems, to meet contributors, to visit provincial Clubs or student societies, and so on."[1]

It had become increasingly difficult to off-load any of this work: as the office had become more burdened, and more central, voluntary help had tended to withdraw. Now, a crisis point had been reached,

> "... where far too many decisions which concern the whole movement are left to the Editor or to the editorial executive, which have correspondingly less time for their editorial concerns. And where the excessive load upon Stuart results in a general slowing-down of initiatives of the rest of the movement."[2]

1 New Left Review Memorandum: 2

2 As above: 3

The proposed solution to this was to separate the work of the journal, and the movement, and make the movement's 'problems' the responsibility, in part, of the board. But the task of specifying quite how far the board should involve itself with the movement was not settled. A majority at the meeting thought the board should continue more or less as it had done till now, but taking on more non-journal work and, 'if occasion arose', co-ordinating closely with the clubs in a joint campaign. A minority though thought that the board should liquidate itself, making way for a 'new left board' that would be more representative of the movement, and therefore in a better position to lead it. The journal, meanwhile, would be edited by an editorial team which, ultimately responsible to the board, would be free to develop its own style, tone, policy. Quite what this decision involved was more difficult to work through. Stuart Hall, accepting a great deal of personal responsibility for the problems of organisation and communication so far, listed a series of questions that he believed had to be worked through.

> "This is part of the 'brief' which any editor and team would rightly insist upon, for the absence of sufficient guidance on this kind of issue has been a main source of tension so far. I am convinced that the problems of style, audience, sense of movement and style of work cannot be left, as it has been so far, for an Editor to attempt to resolve and reconcile within himself and his own policy, for the result is competing priorities and conflicting lines of contact and responsibility - and, necessarily, frustration and disillusionment."[1]

The report from the committee, and Stuart Hall's appendix, were discussed at a subsequent meeting of the board and the clubs, held on 15.7.61.

There, various changes in personnel took place in an atmosphere of crisis and flux. John Saville resigned as chairman, Edward Thompson was elected to take his place; it was announced that Stuart Hall wanted to resign by the end of the year; Suzy Benghiat was appointed secretary to the board.

1 New Left Review Memorandum: 10

The national clubs' committee reported that it was 'suspending its activities' owing to lack of finance and lack of effective support from the Clubs';[1] the new left summer school at Ruskin had been cancelled owing to lack of support; new left books, which had never really got off the ground, were now without a publisher; consideration of the monthly was to be postponed owing to lack of finance.

This meeting did decide that the board should become more directly involved with the clubs. It was to 'take over responsibility for activities (pamphlets, schools) in association with the Clubs'[2] and club representatives were invited onto the renamed 'New Left Board'. The board planned to undertake this work through independent committees to be convened by board members. It was also decided that the editorial team that produced the journal would run this as an independent committee too, and the editor, appointed by the board, would have the right to select the team.

The decision that the board become more involved in club activities was, broadly speaking, something that the troika committee had recommended. How the meeting decided that this should be done owes something though to a letter written to the NLR board by Ralph Samuel and Dennis Butt, and circulated at the meeting.[3] They had made a very strong case for the greater independence of separate areas of new left work. They ran through the individual activities of the new left - from the various and unsuccessful

1 Minutes, NLR board meeting, 15.7.61

2 Minutes, NLR board meeting, 15.7.61

3 . Letter from Dennis Butt and Ralph Samuel to the NLR editorial board, 14.7.61

'journal' projects of producing pamphlets, or books, or convening conferences, to the failing club committee and the disintegrating board. '..... there does not seem to be much point in assessing ..... the ways in which the journal can accommodate the pressure of the Movement', when the movement 'seems very evidently to be running down', they argued. Nor did there seem to be much point in

> "..... combining activities each of which seem, individually, to be poised perilously close to the edge of oblivion, and which we would prefer to see firmly set apart lest one, in falling, should further weaken the fragile hold of the rest or, more positively, so that each can renew its vigour and lead some independent life". [1]

This call for greater autonomy was not based only on a negative assessment of the journal and the clubs so far. It was based, too, on their analysis of what the journal and the new left movement were about. They argued that the polarity between the 'movement of people' and the 'movement of ideas' that the troika committee had described was a false one. Instead the clubs, the wider movement, and the journal should be connected by ideas held in common. The journal had failed here. It had been too nervous, too dull, too detached. It had avoided controversial topics and real debate; it was parasitic on other people's research and analysis; it merely labelled 'areas of new left concern', and failed to explore them further. The journal was suffering from

> ".... a declining belief in the urgency and potency of what we say and so, an impression, at times, that we are not so much engaged in a strenuous effort to change the political and moral climate of the country as indulging, by sophisticated commentary, in polite squiggles in the margin of history." [2]

1. Letter from Dennis Butt and Ralph Samuel to the NLR editorial board, 14.7.61:3
2. As above: 5

They went on to describe how the journal had responded to the differing political commitments of its readers to the Labour Party. Instead of debating these differences, or stating its position, the journal had maintained

> "a nagging, carping, hectoring criticism of the Labour Party, whose rhetoric is in no way matched by the cogency of the alternatives we offer." [1]

So they suggested autonomy, with renewed commitment to the socialist cause.

> "The best service the Review can offer the clubs is by making alive again the ideas and the mission of the New Left, and it is our failure to do this - debilitating, as it has, the confidence and enthusiasm of everyone involved - which hangs clingingly around us. The best service the clubs can do, for themselves as for the review, is to become free, and independent and strong, so that each, being able to live off its own, may be strong enough to help the other." [2]

If they were separately successful, then would be the time to discuss co-ordination.

Following a meeting of London board members on 16.9.61, a team was set up 'to see if they could produce a journal'. [3] But this team could not agree. It came up with conflicting ideas about the New Left Review. Two very different proposals for the New Left Review were produced. The

1 As above: 5

2 As above: 9

3 . Memorandum from Norm Fruchter and Frances Kelly to the editorial board, 14.7.61. Norm Fruchter was an American, teaching in London. He was working as assistant editor on the NLR for issues 6-12

first was drawn up by Ralph Samuel, Dennis Butt and Perry Anderson, who had been a recent guest at board meetings.[1] The second was drawn up by Norm Fruchter, an American who had been closely involved with the New Left Review over the past year, and Frances Kelly, the business manager.

The first proposal from Ralph Samuel, Dennis Butt and Perry Anderson argued for the independence of the journal from the clubs. It proposed that the journal should be just a journal, carrying commentary, analysis and debate. Norm Fruchter and Frances Kelly dissented from a sense of loyalty to the old journal, and to the clubs. They felt that to pursue an independent line would involve 'casting away of many groups who feel allied to us'; 'a retreat from positions we have gained'.[2]

> "We shall lose contact with all the young people in Universities, with Young Socialist groups throughout the country, who used NLR almost as a guide through the maze of international affairs and national politics; we shall lose the Review's specific connections with local and national CND, Labour Clubs, NALSO, and the more than fifteen university journals that have been developing our analyses at local levels. We shall lose the help and co-operation of dozens of professionals; in financial journalism, economics, law, education, youth work, film and television, architecture, jazz, transport, trade unions; who wrote for us because we presented a frame in which they could engage their primary concerns."[3]

Frances Kelly and Norm Fruchter proposed, instead, that the New Left Review become a monthly magazine, to be published along with the six-monthly theoretical journal that John Saville had suggested six months before.[4]

1 Perry Anderson, who had studied PPE at Oxford, had worked on the Oxford student magazines ISIS and New University

2 Memorandum from Norm Fruchter and Frances Kelly: 1

3 Memorandum from Norm Fruchter and Frances Kelly: 3

4 Memorandum from John Saville to NLR board, 15.4.61

At the next full board meeting, the proposal from Ralph Samuel, Dennis Butt and Perry Anderson won the day.[1] Two new team members, Gabriel Pearson and Mervyn Jones were co-opted; Frances Kelly was made co-ordinator, and the team was given the board's support. (Mervyn Jones withdrew from the team in January). It is worth noting though that team editorship was not something which the board, in principle, supported. Rather, it was an attempted solution to the crisis that Stuart Hall's resignation had caused: a new editor had not been found yet to take his place.

When the team took over, the future of the journal was by no means assured. Its circulation was declining: by July 1961, it was selling just half the copies that the New Reasoner and the Universities and Left Review together, had sold. Its finances were very shaky: in the thirteen months from June 1960 to July 1961, it had lost £1,060. 'We were and still are going rapidly broke' wrote Alan Hall in a financial report early in January. Sales had to be raised and costs brought down.

Through this whole period, Nick Faith, John Saville and others on the business committee had exchanged letters on the journal's accounts. Some changes had taken place in accounting practice: an accountant had been employed, part time, to do the books, and in December, after a long search, part time secretarial help had been found. But Frances Kelly,

1 Minutes, new left board, 21-22.10.60. The voting figures were 9 for and 2 against, with 4 abstentions.

2 Letter from Dennis Butt and Ralph Samuel to the new left board, 14.7.61

3 This was a woman, Virginia Mulligan. She resigned around the time that Frances Kelly resigned - May 1962. The accountant was Bob Lawrence

in the office, continued to be very hard pressed. She,like Stuart Hall, was very heavily burdened by the pressures at 'the centre', and simply did not have time to find the advertisers, or the distributors, who would have brought in more cash. With Stuart Hall's departure, she was left in the office alone, with the added responsibility of co-ordinating the scattered team.

Producing the NLR, by team, did prove to be enormously difficult. On the editorial side, co-ordination between different team members and prospective contributors, took time and money; on the business side, the costing of the journal called for stringent control. In late December, the decision was taken to make the next issue a double number. (A planned transitional number was cancelled, in part, because of the later appearance of New Left Review 12). This double number was to be a promotional number, with a larger print and a special sales drive.

This double number produced enormous disagreements. The business committee was anxious about cost, especially since Ralph Samuel was involved. (Nick Faith was dipping into his own pockets to pay back disgruntled Partisan subscribers at this time). It tried, unsuccessfully, to persuade Ralph Samuel and the team that financial prudence was a condition of the survival of the journal. Given that Ralph Samuel worked hardest and initiated most,[1] crisis was the inevitable result. As other board members found the team difficult to communicate with, and impossible to control, there was a growing concensus that one team member, Perry Anderson, should be the next editor. Only one (albeit double) issue was produced by the team.

1 Cf. Letter from Alan Hall to Nick Faith, John Saville and Edward Thompson, 13.2.62. Such was the extent of Nick Faith's mistrust of Ralph Samuel that he wanted the accounts to be hidden from him.

In the end, what was disputed about the team's double issue was not its quality - this was much praised - but its extravagance. To quote from Edward Thompson's report to the new left board on the team:

> "Over the past five months this team had shown some first-rate editorial initiatives, had worked out many plans, given a new editorial direction to the review, with a serious concern for standards and an awareness of the dangers of introversion. This part of the team's work could be judged in the current NLR. But especially in the past three months - centrifugal forces endangered the whole existence of the review. The scattered character of the team and difficulties of communication, together with Ralph's style of work, had led to extreme difficulties in production and liaison."

The final blow, for Nick Faith at least, beyond the late appearance of the journal, had been Ralph Samuel and Dennus Butt's decision to publish 192 pages as against the absolute limit of 176 that the business committee had set.[1] Nick Faith resigned.

The new left board approved Perry Anderson's appointment at its meeting on 14.4.62. In addition to his editorial skills, he had a further point in his favour: he had a large private income, and was able to make several badly needed donations to the journal. He was given freedom, for one year, to gather his own editorial group, and to decide on policy for the review.

Some authority was still vested in the old board. (Ralph Samuel and Dennis Butt were censored by it). But quite how much authority the board had was not made clear. Some board members were very doubtful about the continued viability of the board. (Suzy Benghiat, the secretary to the board, feared that the board had had its day. She certainly wondered whether all the effort to keep it going wasn't an attempt to 'mend and patch over something which is no longer there').[2]

1 Minutes, new left board meeting, 14.4.62
2. Letter from Suzy Benghiat to Edward Thompson, 20.3.62

At the board meeting in July, some mending was done. Distanced or exhausted board members - Doris Lessing, John Hughes, Ralph Samuel, Dennis Butt - resigned. Francis Butler was appointed business manager to replace Frances Kelly, who had resigned in May. New members were invited to join - Tom Nairn, Alan Shuttleworth, Mike Rustin, who like Perry Anderson had been involved with the Oxford student magazine New University,[1] and Ian Campbell. Perry Anderson announced that Tom Nairn and Robin Blackburn, who had also been involved with the New University, had joined the editorial team.[2] Perry Anderson reported at this meeting on the direction that the journal would take. He said the articles the journal carried would be 'accepted on the basis of their intrinsic interest rather than for their place in a pre-established socialist framework'. And he stated his allegiance to marxism, 'the only complete body of socialist theory', that was lacking 'in England'.[3] The review, he implied, would try to right this, by carrying more international writing, and more historical/theoretical analysis of Britain.

Some goodwill was won at this board meeting for the New Left Review. But relations between the team and the board were still not easy, and Raymond Williams found himself trying to mediate between the two groups. He described the struggle over the journal in this way:

1. New University was published when ISIS was taken away from student control. The first issue appeared in October 1960. Several people who worked together on the later New Left Review were involved with New University, including Perry Anderson, Robin Blackburn, Roger Murray, Tom Wengraf, and Gareth Steadman-Jones.

2. Letter from Edward Thompson to Mike Rustin, asking if he would like to join the board, 10.7.62

3. Minutes, new left board, 8.7.62

> "A new style of journal started to emerge, dropping the campaign perspective now that there wasn't a movement to sustain it, and concentrating on basic intellectual work. I was more likely to accept this direction since I had argued for the priority of an educational programme from the start. But I was also a member of the old board, where there was a lot of resistance to the new definition of the journal. At one point there was even a move to exercise legal copyright to prevent the revised journal calling itself New Left Review. I sought above all to try and avoid any such action or pronouncement by the old board, because it became apparent that if it stood on its rights there would be no magazine, that it would simply go. For the new editors could only launch with the goodwill of the old title, which still had its subscriptions and some assets. I wrote to people I knew best on the old board and said 'You may not like what they are doing, but I think it is a condition for sustaining the magazine that we should let them do it'. By then it wasn't a choice of one style or another, it was a question of whether there would go on being any left magazine or not .... It was a survival strategy that I mainly argued", he concluded.
>
> (Williams, 1979: 365-6)

Raymond Williams did succeed in preventing the removal of copyright, and the New Left Review did survive. But its style, its tone, its content, and its relationship to the new left movement, moved further and further from the old New Left Review. Board members were understandably uneasy about this. They had, after all, put their names to the new journal, and did expect some influence there. At a board meeting on 26-27.1.63, several members said that 'they had not had sufficient knowledge of the review's plans in recent months to feel able to offer many suggestions to the office.[1] They had questioned, too, quite what the relationship

1 . Memorandum from Michael Rustin to the editorial board (n.d.). It was drafted in February, 1963

between the board and the review should be. The new team tried to still disquiet by circulating a memorandum on their way of working, where they explained their orientation to the review, and to the old board. This stated:

> "The team starts from the premise that its main task is an intellectual and even a theoretical one ... It is in deepening and extending the analysis and theory available to the left that we see our main purpose, and other considerations, such as wide appeal or immediate political influence have up to now been subordinate to this priority."[1]

They went on to argue that this commitment of theory did not entail breaking with the past. Their commitment on 'major questions of principle' did not, they claimed, differ from the earlier review's. The journal would still carry material on 'non-alignment in relation to CND, the mass media and TV supplement, the Insiders, and the discussion of priorities under capitalism',[2] for example. And they hoped that their 'socialist humanism' would be 'politically as well as intellectually relevant', and would be translated into political terms. They stated too that they hoped the board would participate more in the journal. Whilst the review would be run by the team,

> "We would like to have much more regular communication with Board members, and we will try to keep them fully informed in future of our detailed plans. The team should be able to sustain and respond to criticism, particularly where alternatives and suggestions are offered. We do not mean by communication merely that Board members can write to us and that we will reply. Criticisms and proposals will be raised at editorial team meetings, and often no doubt taken up by team members. We hope members of the Board will come and argue their views themselves. Giving the editor and team full responsibility for a year need not mean that Board members do not share in the shaping of the Review."[3]

1 Memorandum from the team to the new left board, n.d. :2
2 Memorandum from the team to the new left board, n.d. :2
3 Memorandum from the team to the new left board, n.d. :4

And they hoped that the board would find, again, some of its old vigour, discussing the journal and encouraging the other activities that it had engaged in in the past.

Very few members did keep in close contact with the new journal. Some board members published articles in the journal,[1] and some, such as Gabriel Pearson[2] and Raymond Williams, were in favour of some, at least, of the changes that had occurred. But the board, as a working group, had no clear role vis-a-vis the journal, and it could wield no collective authority at all. This was the cause of the dispute with which this thesis opened: the argument between Edward Thompson and Perry Anderson that burst into print in 1965.

Distanced, and effectively disbanded by the journal, the board did still retain responsibility for the clubs. Through the closing months of 1961, and the early months of 1962, the board continued to discuss the work of the various new left committees as though 'the movement' could be encouraged to grow. It considered new left pamphlets, new left books, and an international conference that had been planned for over a year now. It discussed the feasibility of drawing up a 'new left manifesto' which, as the clubs, one by one, ceased to meet, proved not to be feasible at all.

1. These included Michael Barratt-Brown (1963); Lawrence Daly (1962); John Hughes (1963); Mervyn Jones (1962); Ralph Miliband (1962); Gabriel Pearson (1962); Edward Thompson (1962); Raymond Williams (1962). Articles from old board members were much fewer and further between after 1962.

2. Gabriel Pearson (interview)

Edward Thompson continued to urge board members to put their energies into their respective committees,[1] and spoke on 'The Revised Journal and the Outlook for the New Left' at the left club conference that was held in London, March 10-11.3.62.

The clubs, like the journal, were in a state of flux. At their conference in March 1962, the difficulties that the clubs were in was urgently discussed. It was here that Lawrence Daly proposed the formation of a 'national society of socialists' as an answer to the 'organisational chaos' that the new left was in.[2] The conference did not vote to go ahead with this, but several representatives were sympathetic, and Lawrence Daly and another board member, John Rex, continued to campaign for this over the coming months. (It did not get off the ground).

Edward Thompson, the board's chairman, attempted to hold the board together over this difficult period. He urged board members to show 'some serious concern' for the various committees that had been set up.[3] He was determined, too, that the movement should not lose heart.

> "It moves forward again. Applications to join CND come in to Peggy Duff by the hundreds each day. The Committee of 100 starts to count in thousands. Quiescent Left Clubs yawn, rub their eyes, and begin to think of their programmes. The sales of NLR tip upwards again"

1 Cf. Memorandum from Edward Thompson to the new left board, 1.3.62

2 . Minutes, new left board, 17.4.62

3 . Less than half the board members had attended the board meeting on 14.4.62. Edward Thompson subsequently sent round a check list, asking them which activities they would take responsibility for.

he wrote on the 'Notes to Readers', NLR 12 (cover). Club reports were 'patchy', he went on, but the climate was right for people to initiate activities of their own.

The new left board was still involved in discussing and organising new left activities. New left support for a society of socialists and for INDEC (a group that planned to put up independent, unilateralist candidates in the election) were seriously debated at the board meeting in April. Two summer schools were being planned. Some clubs did continue to meet. The Fife Socialist League, and thirty-five clubs, were listed in the NLR up till issue 22 (Nov-Dec 1963). Unfortunately this cannot be taken as an accurate picture. This listing appeared unchanged through 1962 and 1963, and does not indicate whether individual clubs disbanded, and when. One club - Glasgow - disbanded and then reformed in 1966.[1]

The new left marched together on the 1963 Aldermaston march, as it had done on previous years. Another summer school was planned for 1963, which was intended to be more practical and less theoretical than the school the year before.

The two summer schools of 1962 showed up the strengths and the weaknesses of different styles on the left. At one, which the new left board had organised jointly with NALSO, the growing Trotskyist groups such as International Socialists and Young Guard, held sway. They were reported to have won young supporters for active campaigning here.[2] The other was typically new left in style - people shared questions, doubts, confusions. They disagreed, but they did not 'split'. It was a hesitant and unsure occasion, and did not promise active campaigns.

1 Sandy Hobbs (interview)
2 . Private correspondence

The demise of the clubs' movement was not a result, simply, of impatience with discussion. Doris Lessing was surely describing a pervasive sense of despair with politics in general when Anna, in The Golden Notebook, reflected on the overbearing strength of the two power blocs:

> "Sitting there I had a vision of the world with nations, systems, economic blocs, hardening and consolidating; a world where it would become increasingly ludicrous even to talk about freedom, or the individual conscience. I know this sort of vision has been written about, it's something one has read, but for a moment it wasn't words, ideas, but something I felt, in the substance of my flesh and nerves, as true."
>
> Lessing (1973:548).

This takes us back to my starting point: the dispute between Perry Anderson and Edward Thompson over the New Left Review. The diversity of interests, people, campaigns, drawn together in the early new left, fell apart more quickly than they had come together, and without establishing any lasting common ground. The promise of '1956', of extended comradeship and enduring links between different people and perspectives on the left, was broken by the failure of the central characters to work together, and by the movement's caution and mistrust. The bitterness of the most powerful personalities on the New Left Review was matched by the movement's sense that it had been betrayed by them. For everyone concerned, the early new left had met with a disappointing end.

No movement ever completely dies. Although the early new left movement fell apart in 1962, the issues it had raised, the questions it had asked, the experience it had gained, were not all lost in the years to come. Some issues, such as the significance of changes in capitalism, or the nature of the Labour Party, or place of the intellectual in socialist politics, have been on the left's agenda ever since. New left supporters took new left ideas and experience into subsequent campaigns.

Many new left writers have continued to publish work, on socialist history, on communications, on the economy, on nuclear arms and foreign policy, developing their ideas in response to contemporary change. As I noted at the start of this thesis[1], several authors have assessed more recent developments in socialist politics on the basis of their experiences and concerns in the early new left. For the very many early new left supporters whose thoughts have never been published, the early new left marked a time of questioning, exploring, campaigning; a time when politics came to life.

1. Introduction:15.

# CONCLUSIONS

## CONCLUSIONS: THE EARLY NEW LEFT IN HISTORY.

In these conclusions, I begin by summarising the origins, character and weaknesses, and decline of the early new left. I go on to explain briefly what happened in 1962, and why the thesis ends there. Finally, I discuss the consequences of the early new left for British political culture.

### The Origins of the Early New Left.

The early new left, as we have seen, grew up on the heels of the Soviet invasion of Hungary, and the British and French invasion of Suez: the 'twin crises' of 1956. And in the wake of Britain's H bomb tests on Christmas Island in 1957, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament was formed. Much early new left activity was in support of the nuclear disarmament cause. But these dramatic events only partially explain the creation of of the early new left. Its origins, and its character, were a product, too, of the changing context of the cold war.

The division of the world into two hostile camps, the Soviet dominated 'East' and the US dominated 'West' was not merely a political divide at a diplomatic level. It fostered, and was subsequently fed by, a 'two camp' view of knowledge, politics and morality, with each side claiming that truth, freedom, democracy and 'right' belonged to them alone. And in protecting their espoused possession of these virtues, each side came to regard internal dissent as a threat to their own supremacy, and dissenters as 'enemies within', in the service of the other side.

The 1945 Labour Government had aligned Britain with the USA. Its intention, on coming to office, to mediate between the USA and the USSR was jettisoned by the speed, the ferocity and the sharpness of the break between these larger powers. In April 1949, Britain was a founder member of NATO - a

military alliance of European powers and the USA, that pledged to lend mutual assistance against the USSR. Some left-wingers in the Labour Party did protest at the ease with which the Labour Government entered into 'pacts with the USA'. The 'Keep Left' group, as we have seen, warned that democracy was being 'mercilessly squeezed out' between the two blocs, and that neither bloc offered effective shelter to a European nation.[1] But their call for a federation of East and West Europe went unheeded: the Labour leadership, fearful of war, and angered by Soviet foreign policy, committed the nation to the 'Atlantic Pact'. And the 'Keep Left' group changed their tune too. By 1950, they looked to the Atlantic Pact for Britain's military protection as well.

In the face of the continuing cold war, pressure within the Labour Party for an alternative defence policy had crumbled by 1950. Over the next few years, particular aspects of military policy - the war in Korea, the rearmament of Germany, Britain's independent nuclear weapons programme - did command some opposition. For a period in the early 1950s, this dissent was consolidated in the 'Bevanite' group of Labour MP's. But this opposition was always hampered by the call for party unity, and the greater power of right wingers to determine the parameters of the policy around which the party should unite.

Left wingers in the Labour Party were not only disappointed (and disarmed) by the foreign and military policy that their party pursued from the end of the Second World War. The party's economic and welfare policy was viewed critically too. The post-war Labour Government had set itself the twin tasks of meeting the pressing needs of the present - of post-war reconstruction - and laying the foundations of socialism. The Government had met its manifesto promises. 'Key industries' had been nationalised;

1. See Ch.1:62.

the 'welfare state' had been established; full male employment had been achieved. Dissention focused on where the party should go from there.

We have seen how left and right in the party espoused very different roads ahead. The revisionists, who were identified with the right, maintained that the Labour Party was a social democratic party, committed to full male employment and welfare provision in a mixed economy. Some left-wingers meanwhile, argued that the Labour Party should legislate for a socialist economy, subject to the direct control of a democratically elected and controlled state.

The 1950s saw the rise of revisionism in the Labour Party. For the right, this represented the consolidation of the advances that the party had made when in power, and a realistic appraisal of the party's future appeal. For the left, it represented a betrayal of the cause of socialism, since a mixed economy, however prosperous, and a welfare state, however generous, was a far cry for their understanding of the socialist ideal.

The Communist Party in the cold war years did not offer an attractive home to left-wing dissenters in the Labour Party, or to non Labour Party socialists seeking an organisational base. The British Communist Party aligned itself with the USSR and the Eastern bloc in the cold war. The felt need to defend the USSR from attack, undermined the credibility of of the party, and indeed of communism itself. Despite its campaigns for national independence, for a <u>British</u> road to socialism, for peace, the party was unable to overcome the impediment of identification with the USSR.

Nonetheless, there was some space for intellectuals in the party to pursue interests - in history, in literature, in science - and to

debate the policy implications of their work. Intellectuals, as we have seen, could earn the respect of 'King Street', and this increased the autonomy that they had. It was also possible at the local level for branches to conduct campaigns with a measure of independence from the central leadership.

Khrushchev's 'secret speech' at the 20th congress of the CPSU in February 1956, followed by the Soviet invasion of Hungary in November, drove a third of the party's membership to leave. The base that the party had given them to campaign from, and the space that they had created to pursue interests and campaigns in their own ways, could not justify their continued membership of a party whose leadership had 'sided.....with Stalinism' through this period of crisis.[1] Like the left-wing dissenters in the Labour Party, they too had no-where else to go.

The early new left was created by socialists with a range of experience in the cold war years. Some, like G.D.H.Cole, had been profoundly disappointed by the way the Labour Party, in their view, had capitulated to US pressure, and abandoned its socialist ideals. The early new left promised the campaign for those socialist values that had been

> '....remorselessly crushed out between the two immense grinding stones of Communist autocratic centralism and hysterical American worship of wealth and hugeness for their own sake.' (Cole, 1952:32).

Concerned that socialist values should gain greater currency within and outwith the Labour Party, and unhappy with the Labour Party's record in campaigning (over Suez; for disarmament), they looked to the early new left to re-work socialist values, and to inspire popular campaigns.

For ex Communist Party members (and for a few Communist Party members who had decided to remain in the party), the early new left promised to be

1. Thompson, Edward (1956b: supp.4).

a place where socialist values could be reworked, principles reaffirmed, campaigns supported, beyond the reach of the party leadership and the strictures of centralist organisation. In the discussion meetings and working groups, party intellectuals hoped to further the work they had done on British history or literature, without falling into isolation.

The early new left was created too by younger people with little or no prior experience of socialist campaigning. Roused to protest against the British and French intervention in Suez, they were ready to support the CND or the Direct Action Committee. By 1957, when the first issues of the Universities and Left Review and the New Reasoner were published, and when the Direct Action Committee and the National Council for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons Testing (which became the CND) were formed, cold war tension had already eased. Despite the continuing arms race between the USA and the USSR, a precarious modus vivendi had been reached. Radical dissent could no longer be easily condemned for 'serving the other side', and, slowly, space was being claimed to explore alternative views of political, social and indeed cultural life.

The early new left was able to draw on and to support other attempts to establish a radical milieu in this avowedly 'conformist' decade. As we have seen, it attempted to embrace as many significant themes, people, and campaigns as it could, discussing the work of 'committed' writers and film-makers, and of social theorists such as Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart.

## The Character and Weaknesses of the Early New Left.

A loose amalgam of ex Communist Party members, young people who were new to politics, and left-wing Labour Party members, the early new left was an intellectual movement on the left. It was focused on the new left

journals: the Universities and Left Review; the New Reasoner; the New Left Review, which provided analysis, inspiration and some organisational guidance to the new left clubs. Edited by intellectuals, the Universities and Left Review and the New Left Review spoke most clearly to younger people who were destined for the expanding white collar professions. The New Reasoner, produced by ex Communist Party members, had a rather different appeal, as we have seen. But the New Reasoner was an intellectual journal too in the sense that it was not a news or campaigning journal, but a journal of ideas.

The clubs were first and foremost discussion forums. In some places, and on some issues, clubs did engage in some campaigning too (supporting the movement for nuclear disarmament; becoming involved in local community issues or education). But the clubs, as we have seen, never built a sound organisational base of their own. The clubs, right through their limited life, relied on the journals for ideas, for speakers - for a sense that they were engaging in a shared politics, and were part of the 'new left'. Club members were '99.9%' middle class.

New left intellectuals attempted to embrace the breadth of human experience in their work. The themes of commitment and socialist humanism gave expression to the sense of responsiblity for social and political life that new left socialists shared. Be it in central Africa or Algeria or Notting Hill, they recognised that human suffering had political causes, and could be alleviated by political change. Suffering that was caused by the actions of the British state implicated British socialists all the more. Through its creative writing and its journals, the early new left expressed this commitment in varied and novel ways.

'Lived experience' was the phrase that Raymond Williams coined when tracing changes in social life in Britain. It was a phrase that the early new left took on board, as it embarked on rediscovering the conditions, the beliefs, the aspirations of the 'ordinary people' with which socialists, they feared, had ceased to engage. Concerned that the commercial media was destroying traditional working class values, it attempted to strengthen working class culture by linking it with struggles and hopes from the past. Young people especially aroused their lively interest. This 'unnoticed generation', they realised, had been ignored by political analysts and alienated from political life, for too long.

This 'culture and community' theme was more characteristic of the Universities and Left Review than the New Reasoner. Produced, primarily, by socialists who had been in the Communist Party, the New Reasoner's first task was to rebuild socialist principles from the debris of Stalinism. Starting from the belief that moral reasoning was essential to political analysis, it was New Reasoner authors who theorised the socialist humanism theme. They looked back to the socialist tradition of the past, and claimed a direct line of descent from earlier socialist campaigners to themselves. In particular, they sought to bring together the work of Morris and Marx, rescuing Morris from obscurity and Marx from misrepresentation. They hoped to rebuild a distinctly British marxism, freed from the 'desiccated formulae' of the cold war years.[1] This marxism promised to be responsive to the work of communist 'dissidents' in the East, the relevant to the cause of socialism here. They recognised too that working class support for socialism had lost ground. But they believed that so long as the working class were exploited under capitalism, the will for change could be revived.

1. Saville (1957:79), quoting Tawney.

Both the Universities and Left Review and the New Reasoner took up the claims of the Labour Party revisionists that capitalism had entered a new, responsible and acceptable phase. They recognised that the revisionist case could not be adequately countered simply by political arguments alone. Instead, it was necessary to engage with the substance of revisionist arguments, and to propose others in their stead. The Universities and Left Review, as we have seen, conducted their most serious piece of research in response to the Labour Party document Industry and Society that was passed as policy at the 1957 Labour Party conference. This rejected the revisionist case on the grounds, firstly, that capitalism's priorities were still 'inhumane', and secondly that it was subject not to democratic pressure but to oligarchic control. The New Reasoner supported the Universities and Left Review's analysis. It went on, as we have seen, to work out a range of reformist demands (for example, the'Socialist Wages Plan'). These demands were intended both to wrest important gains in the present, and, by finding capitalism's 'sticking point', to hasten revolutionary change.

Nuclear disarmament was, at once, the most significant issue and campaign that the early new left took on board. The nuclear disarmament movement, as we have seen, grew up at the same time as the early new left. It too was a response to immediate events (the British and French intervention in Suez; the testing of Britain's H bomb). But as with the early new left, it was a response that was made possible by the easing of cold war tensions, and that drew on the work that others (pacificists; the Bevanite left in the Labour Party) had done in the cold war years. The nuclear disarmament movement refused to be bound by the 'remorseless logic' of the nuclear arms race. It opposed the production and installation of nuclear weapons by Britain, and indeed by any other power, first and foremost on moral grounds.

We have seen how many previously apolitical people were drawn into the campaign: its supporters saw themselves as moral as much as if not more than political actors, and often felt the more committed as a result. And the argument that Britain, by taking unilateral action, would assume 'moral leadership' in the world served, more than any other sentiment, to unify the campaign.[1] The claim that the bomb was a moral issue effectively freed the discussion of nuclear weapons policy from the narrow confines of political ideologies and party loyalties and disputes where it had been trapped in the cold war years. Arguments in terms of strategy and 'deterrence' that were (and are) used to justify nuclear weapons policy were rendered illegitimate on the simple grounds that nuclear weapons are wrong.

The early new left attempted to give this moral rejection of nuclear weapons a political dimension. The New Reasoner, in particular, developed a case for 'positive co-existence' between East and West; it argued that Britain, together with a 'third force of neutral nations', should commit itself to 'active neutrality'. The Universities and Left Review, while devoting less space to theorising the nuclear disarmament cause, did articulate the sense that the bomb was emblematic of the evils of capitalism, the most terrible feature of a social system that the early new left opposed. The early new left was also concerned to theorise the political significance of the movement for nuclear disarmament. On the one hand, this involved consideration of how the movement could achieve its goal. How far should it put its energies into converting the Labour Party, for example? On the other, it was to do with an appreciation of what was new about the campaign. Here the Universities and Left Review was quicker to see what was special about the movement for nuclear disarmament. The specialness - both of the nuclear disarmament movement and indeed of the early new left- was their relative autonomy from

1. See Taylor and Pritchard (1980:55).

the traditional organisations of the left. 'The political parties have been by-passed by the new radical movement' stated the editorial in Universities and Left Review 6.[1] It had created a terrain between the hold of the political parties that, to quote G.D.H.Cole, had been 'remorselessly crushed out' in the cold war years.[2]

The early new left and the nuclear disarmament movements, together, had created a terrain, or a milieu, where a range of issues could be discussed, campaigns supported, and where socialist values could be reaffirmed. By committing themselves to a new left 'way of life',new left supporters attempted to 'live' their politics - to be open to the personal implications of their political work. Taking up Forster's 'only connect', they looked to the connections between human experiences at all levels, and in all nations. This phrase signified their willingness to be open to all comers and all issues, and to see all human experience in political terms. And in socialist humanism they had found a political orientation that, kept at a very general level, was able to embrace these different concerns.

The early new left's very openness and diversity was not a lasting strength. The range of people who came together in 1957, to 'huddle together for warmth'[3] shared a commitment to rework their socialist ideas. But their motivation to do this varied: the experience of Stalinism; the rise of Labour Party revisionism; the ossification of socialist culture in the cold war years; and they did not establish lasting common ground. The three kinds of analysis that the New Left Review carried represented real differences between new left socialists, differences that could not be indefinitely contained.

1. Editorial, Universities and Left Review 6, Spring 1959.

2. Cole, (1952:32).

3. Sheila Benson (interview).

The 'socialist history', 'left-wing labourist' and 'class and community' approaches could not co-exist happily in the same journal, or indeed in the same movement. They differed at such a fundamental level that the promise of a new socialist community was lost.

The existence of such basic differences had the effect, in addition, of limiting analysis and hampering discussion. Points were not always pressed, or differences explored, since people were aware that to do so would threaten the fragile unity of the review. The result was not a lively and challenging journal but, to quote Peter Sedgwick, 'a merry-go-round in which each specialised hobby-horse rotates into view by turns'.[1] The debate between Raymond Williams and Edward Thompson over The Long Revolution was an exception to this. But, as we have seen,[2] the tone of Edward Thompson's criticisms was less indicative of a genuine dialogue than of a defence of the 'socialist history' school.

There were, in addition, real absences in the issues that the early new left took up. We have seen how the position of women never became an early new left 'concern' - neither did the family, or personal relationships more generally. These absences weakened early new left work. Its analysis was male-centred, and its campaigning was male-dominated, and the possibility of speaking to the 'lived experience' of women was lost.

The early new left was weakened by its middle classness too. It appealed to 'new publics' - to young middle class people in particular - but not to the working class. Its attempts to understand the 'ordinary people', like its attempts to draw in working class campaigners, were indicative of its distance from them.

1. Sedgwick (1976).
2. See Ch.11:354-9.

Meanwhile, the early new left remained ambivalent about the major organisation for working class politics: the Labour Party. It attempted, as we have seen, to have 'one foot in and one foot out' of the Labour Party, hoping thereby to have some influence over party policy, but to remain independent of party control. But this strategy proved rather harder to carry out. Questions such as whether all early new left supporters should join the Labour Party; whether it should support non-unilateralist Labour candidates in the elections, or risk proscription by publically supporting non-Labour unilateralists, were never resolved, and occured again and again. For they were based on very different views of the socialist potential of the Labour Party - views that, again, were ultimately incompatible and resistant to change.

## The Decline of the Early New Left.

These weaknesses, together with the organisational weakness of the early new left, led to the decline of the movement, and to the transformation of the journal. There were very basic disagreements within the early new left on how organised it should be. Should the journals be organising journals for the clubs? Should the clubs adopt a statement of aims? Should the early new left form a new political party? These disagreements were not settled either. Instead, the early new left avoided organisation. The first New Left Review never freed itself from the pressure to service the clubs; and the clubs never established effective co-ordination or communication on their own. By eschewing organisation, the early new left did avoid democratic centralism - the organisational form that the Communist Party had exposed. But it did not evolve new administrative and organisational practices to take its place. Instead, as all too often in political groups, the most powerful (male) personalities wielded

the greatest influence; new people were seldom co-opted and integrated into established working groups; and when the key people were too exhausted to carry the work of the New Left Review and the clubs any longer, the early new left broke down.

The CND suffered a parallel, though less rapid decline. The CND had always been the main constituency for the early new left. It was here that the early new left hoped to offer some valuable political analysis, and to gain new support. The CND's decline in the early and mid 1960s was a product of the disillusionment and exhaustion of its supporters, in the face of the campaign's continuing failure, and of international change. The reversal of the unilateralism vote in the Labour Party in 1961 marked the defeat of the major strategy that the campaign had pursued - the conversion of the Labour Party. It crystallised the impatience that many nuclear disarmers felt with the slow, safe, constitutional approach to campaigning that the CND executive espoused. For a brief period, the Committee of 100 attracted their support. But after a series of dramatic protests, culminating in ever increasing numbers of arrests, the Committee of 100 lost steam too.

Two international events contributed, as we have seen, to the nuclear disarmament movement's decline. The Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962 did not result in nuclear war. Perhaps, nuclear disarmament supporters wondered, these deadly weapons were only diplomatic weapons, after all. And the first test ban treaty in August 1963 sent weapons testing underground, and out of sight. Buried, too, was public awareness of how destructive these weapons were.

The decline of the early new left movement was speeded by the loss of

momentum in its main constituency, the CND. It was speeded too by changes in the Labour Party. When it had lost the election in 1959, many new left supporters had regarded the Labour Party as a weak party, due,in their eyes, for radicalisation or obscurity. They were proved wrong on both counts. The votes on nuclear disarmament in 1960 and 1961 illustrated all too graphically that the leadership was far from willing to abandon its control over party policy - and that it could bring the membership into line. And over the next few years, Labour's fortunes improved, leading to election victories in 1964 and 1966. Its fortunes had improved amongst many new left socialists too. Harold Wilson, who replaced Hugh Gaitskell on his sudden death in 1963, was not identified with the right of the party. (Wilson, as we have seen, was one of the Labour MP's who had resigned from the Government on the introduction of health service charges in 1951).[1] He was also less publically committed to Britain's 'independent deterrent'.

The Labour Party had also responded, in limited ways, to other concerns that the early new left had addressed. In autumn 1959, the Labour Party Young Socialists were launched. It had taken up Gaitskell's criticisms of 'public wealth and private squalor', proposing new welfare measures in 1961 . It had amended its revisionist policies to allow for greater state control, now that capitalism's apparent stability had given way to successive balance of payments crises.[2]

In the mid and late 1960s, the Labour Party did provide something of a political home for early new left and nuclear disarmament supporters. (Raymond Williams described how most of the CND people he knew joined what they described as the 'new model' Labour Party.[3]). Others were drawn to the Trotskyist left, which had been slowly but steadily growing since 1956. The Socialist Labour League, and other groups such as the Revolutionary

1. See Ch.1:57.
2. See Signposts for the Sixties (1961). Labour Party, 1961.
3. See Williams (1979:366).

Workers' Party, the International Socialists, and Solidarity, a more anarchist group, offered a clarity of analysis, of organisation, of strategy so different from the early new left. And some early new left supporters joined the Communist Party which was still the biggest party on the left, after the Labour Party. In 1960, the Communist Party had changed its policy to support unilateralism - a change that helped open the way for early new left and CND supporters to join.

The early new left supporters who joined these organisations were drawn by the prospect of a campaigning base. The early new left, as we have seen, was very weak here. More of a discussion movement than an activist one, it lost support when its members grew impatient with discussion, and wanted to put more energy into campaigning work. But none of these groups could replace the early new left. A movement and not an organisation, the early new left had promised to create an alternative, radical socialist community, independent from political parties, and united in the very diversity of its concerns. By 1962, it promised this no more. The clubs were already in decline: those members who had not joined other organisations were losing interest too. The CND was in crisis, and the New Left Review, after the change in editors, was no longer easily identified as the journal of, or for,the early new left.

## 1962: The Changeover on the New Left Review.

As we saw in Ch.11, the changeover in the editors of the New Left Review took place after a period of protracted discussion in 1961 - protracted because the journal's editors and adminstrators disagreed over how the journal should be produced; over what kind of material the journal should carry; over what its relationship to the clubs should be. When Stuart Hall announced in July 1961 that he had decided to resign as editor by the end of the year, no new editor came forward to take the New Left

Review beyond this confusion. Two months later, the board agreed that the New Left Review be edited by an editorial team. This team - of Dennis Butt, Ralph Samuel and Perry Anderson, proposed that the New Left Review break with the new left movement. They argued that the crisis and decline of the movement was affecting the journal too, and the journal could only develop its strengths alone. Thus, the separation between the clubs and the journal was agreed before the changeover, and responsibility for movement activities was taken on the new left board.

This team took over at a time when the New Left Review was losing its readers and 'going rapidly broke'.[1] The late and extravagant double number that it produced weakened the journal still further: in February 1962, the future of the journal was by no means assured. The appointment of one of the team members, Perry Anderson, as editor, appeared to be the only course of action that the board could take: there was no other candidate for editor, and team editorship was not believed to be viable in the longer term.

Under Perry Anderson's editorship, the New Left Review did break with the traditions that the Universities and Left Review and the New Reasoner had begun. The new journal stated its allegiance to 'continental' marxism, and was more explicitly marxist than any of its parent journals had been. It carried a different kind of international material, embarking on 'totalising country studies' of third world countries, in place of the 'subjectivist' approach of the earlier New Left Review.[2] It embarked on a series of theoretically informed studies of British history from the English Revolution of 1640 on, in place of the more detailed, empirical approach of the New Reasoner. And it no longer carried material on or for the early new left or nuclear disarmament movements;

1. Financial report to the new left board, Jan.1962. (See Ch.11:385). Mervyn Jones and Gabriel Pearson subsequently joined the team.
2. See Wengraf (1979).

the campaign perspective of the earlier New Left Review did not feature in the new journal. Instead, it embarked on analysing the Labour Party.

Nonetheless, the intellectual break between the later and the earlier New Left Review has appeared sharper through the prism of time. These different priorities and emphases jelled only slowly: the New Left Review was not effectively remodelled till 1964- 1965.[1] By then, the political context in Britain had changed too:

> 'For the first time, the national crisis of British capitalism was unmistakeable: the long Conservative regime of the 50s was visibly sinking, as the failure of the CND and the eclipse of the New Left were succeeded by the revival of the fortunes of the Labour Party.'
>
> Anderson (1980:137-8).

It was to make sense of these changes that the New Left Review carried the series of articles by Perry Anderson and Tom Nairn on British politics from the English Revolution, the articles that provoked the public storm between Edward Thompson and Perry Anderson with which this thesis began.

The personal break was somewhat sharper. When Perry Anderson was appointed editor, the board had no formal control over the journal. Nonetheless, Perry Anderson, and the group he gathered round him, were wary of the influence that the board could wield. Threatened by the strong and critical voices that particular board members were raising, they did turn away from their 'elders' on the board. As Perry Anderson describes in Arguments in English Marxism, 'the material and intellectual resources' of the old board were 'incomparably greater' than theirs; they lacked political and editorial experience; and they felt an 'exaggerated sense of generational distance' from them.[2] In order to discover their own identity and direction, they dislocated themselves and the New Left Review from the journal's founders, and indeed from the early new left.

1. See Anderson (1980:157-8).
2. See Anderson (1980:137).

It seems likely that this personal break, more than the slower intellectual break, was the cause of the sense of betrayal that some board members felt.

As early as 1963, it is very unlikely that the first New Left Review and the clubs movement could have been revived or reunited. Various attempts to do this (by the magazine Views;[1] by the May Day Manifesto movement and bulletins of 1968-1970[2]) were themselves shortlived. The May Day Manifesto movement split over the questions of standing independent candidates in the next election; over the desirability of the growing control of Trotskyist groups in the movement; because it was out of touch with the different form of radical politics that came out of 1968.[3] It was testimany, once again, of the inordinate problems that stand in the way of sustaining a non-aligned movement, and of co-ordinating the splintered left.

The Early New Left and Political Culture.

Today, there is a left in Britain that is not contained in political parties and that is committed to change on the broadest spectrum of issues. The nuclear disarmament movement, the women's movement, the movement against imperialism, the ecology movement, as Raymond Williams argues,[3] still inspire interest and support against worsening political odds. And as capitalism in crisis finds newer and more oppressive ways to control the working class, the left in the Labour Party, in the trade union movement, in the Communist Party and in other left groups, is struggling to protect threatened jobs, pay levels, working conditions, and the welfare state. These contemporary movements are far stronger than the early new left movement of the 1950s. They have achieved a level of analysis,

1. Views was a quarterly political magazine. In 1964 several early new left supporters: Stuart Hall; Alan Lovell; Michael Rustin; Margaret Rustin; Robin Murray; Kenneth Trodd joined the editorial committee, and tried to turn it into a new left magazine. It folded in 1966, when the publishers refused to back it any longer.
2. See Williams (1979:373-5) for a description of the May Day Manifesto.
3. See Williams (1983).

activity and support that has earned them recognition across the political spectrum. There has been some cross-fertilisation between these movements and the organised left. Slowly and unevenly, the Labour Party and the trades union movement are taking up the insights and demands of the women's movement for example, and the women's movement is becoming more actively involved in the politics of class. The 'intellectual' left in Britain is much stronger too. There are now dozens of non-party journals and magazines, some to service these movements, so much so that the arena for socialist ideas that the Universities and Left Review and the New Reasoner set out to establish is taken for granted today. There has also been an enormous growth in the publication of socialist books, in the production of socialist plays, TV programmes, films. For all its shortcomings, there is a lively, varied and imaginative left in Britain, a left that had not existed in the cold war years, and that the early new left only barely achieved.

There are some lines of descent from the early new left of the 1950s and early 1960s, to the diffuse left of today. These lines have been unevenly drawn: the history of the left is the history of breaks and rapprochements, of loss and rediscovery, setagainst changing needs and experiences over time.

The early new left, as we have seen, took up a diversity of issues and campaigns, and attempted to unite them under common themes. These issues - nuclear disarmament and foreign policy; the nature of community and the quality of the environment; 'committed art'; the significance of changes in capitalism; the question of human agency and the moral dimension in politics; the place of'new publics' ( young people, middle class people) and of intellectuals in political life; the role of a non-aligned left - are issues that are with us still. But they have not all retained their prominence as issues of concern to socialists,and our ways of understanding

and campaigning for them have changed too.

When they lost their temporary unity in the early new left, some of the issues that had concerned the early new left suffered a temporary eclipse. For several years in the mid 1960s, the sense that foreign policy, and in particular the Anglo-American alliance, patterns social and economic policy was lost.[1] The growth of a more militant 'point of production' politics in the 1960s denied a place to the 'new publics' and the 'culture and community' concerns that the early new left had spoken with and to. And the loss of an arena for a non-aligned left meant that questions to do with political organisation and party structures were posed far less sharply. For some of these issues, this eclipse was only a partial one. 'Culture and community' concerns gathered momentum as single issue campaigns. By the end of the 1960s, community-based politics had an established place on the left, and had achieved some local successes too. The 'communications' theme that Raymond Williams and the Universities and Left Review had pioneered, had become more topical in the 1960s, even though the new Labour Government did not take it up.[2] And there was a growing movement of people working in television in particular, who had been inspired by the early new left, and who were particularly concerned about the social consequencies of their work.[3] Young people, ethnic minorities, women - 'new publics' for political campaigning - achieved a stronger sense of identity as distinct and oppressed groups. Their separate campaigns for political changes were not absorbed by the organised left.

This eclipse was also of variable duration. Foreign policy (but not nuclear

1. See Williams (1979:367).
2. Williams describes Labour Party silence to his book Communications in Williams (1979:369-371).
3. Dennis Potter and Jeremy Seabrook are names that come to mind here.

weapons) catapulted back onto the socialist agenda with Vietnam. An alternative, revolutionary culture, distanced from the 'ordinary people' but with enormous vitality, grew out of 1968. The mid '70s saw the renaissance of a non-aligned left, brought together briefly in the'Beyond the Fragments' movement and taking on the insights that the women's movement, anti-racist groups, and the non-Leninist left, such as Big Flame, have gained. Problems of organisation and communication bedevilled the non-aligned left in the 1970s as they had in the 1950s, and this new attempt at unity was short-lived too. But these problems were given much serious and detailed thought. The early new left, as we have seen, were fearful that any form of structure would replicate democratic centralism. It settled for the minimum level of organisation, and failed to experiment with alternative organisational forms. In the late 1970s and since, various ways of working collectively have provided some way through the difficulties of campaigning and communicating in the non-party left.

Consideration of the relationship between the moral and the political was more permanently eclipsed. The Vietnam Solidarity Campaign - the main organisation that campaigned against the Vietnam war in Britain - broke with the tradition of the CND. '....it called, not for peace but for victory, not for neutralism but for socialism in Vietnam', recalled Perry Anderson.[1] It resisted the war on the political grounds of opposition to US imperialism. The question of whether or not the war should be opposed, and socialism supported, on moral grounds too was not a focal concern.

With the renaissance of the nuclear disarmament movement from the later 1970s, political change is once again being demanded on both moral and political grounds. Arguments about the effectiveness of moral reasoning on the political process are being replayed. Today, more nuclear disarmers

1. Anderson (1980:152).

do believe that disarmament should be seen in political terms. There is a much clearer understanding that militarism and imperialism must be confronted at all levels of society before the arms race will be halted, and peace secured. This understanding does not preclude any sense that to possess and develop these weapons is wrong. Instead, the movement now looks back to the 'first wave' of the campaign, when unilateralism was felt to be a simple, morally compelling cause and recognises how inadequate that sense was.

The early new left, as we have seen, did attempt to develop a political case of unilateralism. It campaigned for 'active neutrality', for a'third force' of neutral nations', addressing the political context in which disarmament could take place. Some of those early new left campaigners have played a very active part in politicising today's campaign, and the richness of their contribution owes much to their early new left past. Dorothy Thompson, Edward Thompson, Raymond Williams are central figures today in the nuclear disarmament movement. They have opened up whole areas of debate: on whether militarism has a logic of its own; on the effects of militarism on ourselves and other cultural forms; on the possibility of a nuclear free Europe; on forming links with the dissident movement in Eastern Europe and the USSR. Early new left concerns - whether capitalism can be understood by looking at the economy alone; 'lived experience' and community; the links between distinct social processes; the possibility of a third force of neutral nations; and the possibility of working together with dissidents in East Europe over disarmament - are being revived and reworked here, in an effort to counter the new cold war.

'Socialist humanism'. the theme that the New Reasoner used to bring moral and political consciousness together, and that lent a sense of unity to early new left concerns, has not regained prominance in recent years. But marxism has changed too, and the particular insights that

socialist humanism set out to re-establish: that socialism concerns all aspects of human relationships, and all areas of human life; that people are responsible for their actions and can be agents for change, have not been lost since. The overly economistic and deterministic marxism of the cold war years was a product of Communist Party defensiveness in those ossifying years. Faced by a new cold war, marxism is now too varied, too established, too influential, to retreat into determinism again.

The early new left did help to bring marxism to life after the cold war years. Unhappy with the marxism of their day, early new left writers and supporters did not have to see themselves as marxist, or engage directly with marxist concepts, to contribute to this revival. By naming a broad spectrum of issues as political concerns, they opened the way for others to extend and rework marxism, so that non-economic processes and relationships could be adequately addressed. They opened the way too for more flexible appraisals of changes in the economy under capitalism, by marxists and indeed by the left as a whole. The deterministic marxism of the cold war years stuck to a cataclysmic model of capitalism, and predicted ever worsening crises, and ultimate change, come what may. This model could not address 1950s 'affluence' and full male employment, and the early new left embarked on an analysis of how far capitalism had changed. The Insiders authors, as we have seen, concluded that capitalism had not been transformed, but that it had found new ways of meeting crises and ensuring growth. Since that time, socialist economists have researched and debated the development of capitalism: this early new left theme has never been lost.

There has been some continuity too in the involvement of socialist intellectuals in political life. In the cold war years, intellectuals, like all socialists,

faced a choice of party membership or isolation. Few ( such as Isaac Deutscher) managed to publish significant work in circumstances such as these. The early new left did attempt to create a space for intellectuals on the left that was free from any party political pressure. When the early new left declined, this space was not all lost. The New Left Review journal survived, providing one place where socialist intellectuals could publish their work. Several notable early new left figures, and in particular the ex Communist Party historians, published books on a spectrum of topics. New journals were published too. Student magazines, Views, Sanity (a CND journal, first published in 1961), the Socialist Register (first published in 1964), The Spokesman (first published in 1968), and others were among the growing plurality of journals that could not not have survived in the 1950s, and that has grown larger since. The Universities and Left Review and the New Reasoner were the first non-party socialist journals of the post war period: they initiated a lasting tradition. And this list of the editors and board members of the early new left journals: Stuart Hall, Raphael Samuel, Peter Worsley, John Rex, John Hughes, Ken Alexander, Ralph Miliband, Michael Barratt-Brown, Alan Lovell, Mervyn Jones, Alasdair MacIntyre, John Saville, Dorothy Thompson, Edward Thompson (and others could be included too) reads like a roll-call of major intellectual figures on the left today. Through these people alone, the early new left continues to inform political culture in our time.

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